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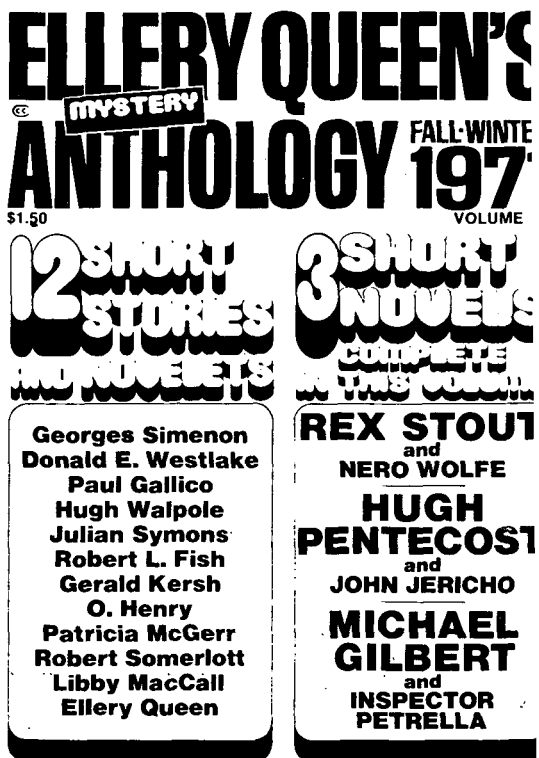

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Mystery Magazine

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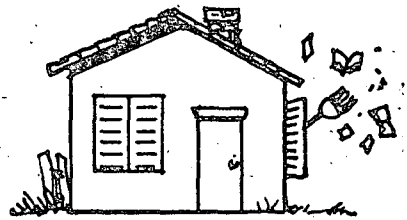

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a NEW John Jericho story by

HUGH PENTECOST

John Jericho, the huge red-bearded artist and the self-appointed fighter for all the underdogs in the world, has a strange and moving encounter on a mountain. It was nearly midnight—a pitch-black night lashed by rain and wind. And what Jericho found on the narrow dirt road, in the gleam of his headlights, turned on all his anger . . .

JERICHO AND THE DEAD CLUE

by HUGH PENTECOST

The rain beat against the windshield of the red Mercedes. The windshield wipers fought a losing battle against the torrent of water. The night was pitch-black except for an occasional jagged flash of lightning in the distance, which revealed the trees bent by the swirling wind. Jericho, his huge body crouched over the wheel, was straining to see the few yards ahead of the car which was all the vision of the narrow dirt road his headlights revealed. Damn the gas-station attendant who had told him this short cut would save him five miles in reaching the Foster estate! In places the road had been so encroached upon by brush it was almost impassable.

Fortunately the Mercedes was only creeping through the storm when Jericho saw the girl just eight or ten yards ahead of him. She was sitting in the middle of the road, cradling something in her lap. The brakes squealed as Jericho came to a stop a few feet in front of her.

She sat there, bent over the thing in her lap, apparently unaware of the cones of light that surrounded her. She was wearing some kind of open-necked blouse and slacks. Her hair was matted to her head.

Jericho swore. He had no raincoat or hat in the car. He sounded the horn. The girl didn't move. Jericho turned up the collar of his tweed jacket,

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opened the car door, and stepped out into the wild night. The rain slashed at him. He stepped over to the girl and bent down, water running off the tip of his red beard.

He touched the girl's shoulder. She didn't move. She was still bent down over the thing in her lap. Jericho saw that it was a large dog, a Golden Retriever he thought. A tongue lolled grotesquely out of the side of the dog's mouth.

The girl said something he couldn't hear over the rain and wind and the distant rumble of thunder.

"What?" he shouted at her.

She looked up at him. Her face was small, pert, tragedy-twisted. "I think he's dead," she said in a high thin voice.

"You can't sit here in the middle of the road," Jericho said.

"I—I can't lift him," the girl said.

"I'll help you."

"Can—can you make sure he's dead? I mean—if he isn't and moving him would be painful—"

Jericho squatted close to her and raised the dog's head. The side that had been in her lap was smashed in like a broken eggshell. Jericho sensed the sticky feel of blood in the palm of his hand.

"He's dead," he said.

"Please help," the girl said. Her mouth was drawn down at the corners. Jericho couldn't distinguish rain from tears. For a moment he thought she might be only twelve or thirteen. Then, as he bent closer to get his arms under the dog's body, he became aware of the smell of liquor on the girl's breath.

He lifted the heavy dog into his arms and carried it over to the side of the road. He started to put the body down. The girl was at his side, her slim shoulder touching him. He could feel her shaking.

"We can't leave him here," she said.

"Where?" Jericho shouted at her.

A flash of lightning revealed her small tortured face. He was angry, annoyed, soaked to the skin, but he felt pity for her. She waved vaguely down the road.

"My cabin is about a hundred yards in from the road," she said. "Could you—would you—?"

"I can't leave my car here," he said.

"There's a place to park just ahead—on the right-hand side," she said.

He couldn't be any wetter than he was. He put the dog's body down on the grass. "Show me," he said.

She knelt beside the dog, a

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hand on the shattered head. "It's just a few yards," she said.

Jericho went back to the car, muttering to himself. He got in and pulled ahead. He saw a little area cut out of the brush and a narrow path leading away into the darkness. He parked the car, got a flashlight out of the glove compartment, and went back to the girl.

"You light the way," he said.

She stood up and took the flash. Jericho lifted the dog again and followed. The girl's judgment of distance was faulty. He guessed it was closer to three hundred yards before they came into a clearing. He saw a feeble light burning in the window of some sort of shack.

The girl reached the door and opened it. She stood aside.

"You want him in the house?" he asked.

"Where else? This is where he lived," she said.

The light came from an old-fashioned kerosene lamp. The shack consisted of one large room. There was an iron sink in one corner with a pump-handle device that evidently produced water from a well. There was a kerosene stove, a double bed, a box spring on an iron frame, covered with a torn spread and some cushions. There were two overstuffed armchairs, a small table with a wooden kitchen chair pulled up to it. On the table was a jelly glass, an empty bourbon bottle, and one half full. Beside the bed was a new and modern-looking AM-FM radio, obviously battery operated. At the foot of the bed, on the floor, was a small mat covered with an old army blanket. The girl pointed to it.

"That's Igor's bed," she said. "Will you put him there, please."

Jericho put the dog down and stood up, flexing his aching arm muscles. The girl had gone to a bureau and came back with a bath towel which she handed to Jericho.

"Help you get a little dry," she said.

He took the towel and dried his thick red hair and his bearded face. The girl got a towel for herself. When she had dried her hair a little he saw that it was long and blonde. She went over to the stove and got a second jelly glass, then poured two large drinks of bourbon into the glasses.

"You don't want to get pneumonia," she said.

There was a strange elfin quality to her.

"You camping out here? Vacationing?" he asked.

"I live here," she said.

He took a long swallow of the bourbon and was grateful

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for its quick warmth.

"I'm sorry about your dog," he said.

Her lips quivered. "I—I just don't understand it," she said.

"It's pretty hard to see anything in this storm," he said. "If I hadn't been crawling I'd almost certainly have run you down."

"It's the first time Igor has ever left me since—since David went away," the girl said.

"David?"

"My David," the girl said. "He left me the shack, and he left me Igor. Igor has never gone twenty yards away from the shack before unless he went with me. But tonight, in this storm, he went all the way out to the road. I just don't understand it."

"So he wandered off. I'm sorry. You didn't see or hear a car?"

"You couldn't hear a motor in this storm, and you can't see lights on the road from here. Igor asked to go out. I thought he must have an upset stomach or something because he's afraid of thunderstorms. When—when he didn't bark to come in again, I finally went to look for him. I—I opened the door and I—I thought I heard him howling—far away. Of course, it could have been the wind. I ran down the path and finally, when I reached the road, I stumbled over him. I—I think he was still alive then. But he died while I was trying to comfort him. Another slug?" She pointed to his glass.

"Thanks," he said.

She poured him a generous refill. "You're wondering about me," she said.

"Well, yes, I am."

"David brought me here," she said. "I mean it was the only place he could bring me to after his family cut him off."

"Cut him off?"

"They didn't approve of me," the girl said. There was a threat of underlying hysteria in the high voice, in the compulsive rapidity of her words. "I had been a hostess in a discotheque in Vegas. David was there on leave. We—we got together."

"And his family cut him off because of you?"

"That left us up the creek because of course David couldn't get a job—he was still in the Army. But he did own this shack, and there was Igor, and there was the Jaguar convertible which he turned into cash. David deeded over this place to me in spite of everything Milo could do, and he told me to wait here till he got back—which would be about a year—and he—"

"Back from Vietnam?"

"Only he isn't coming

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back," the girl said, her teeth chattering against the rim of the jelly glass as she swallowed her bourbon. "Missing in action. And Milo tells me there's no use waiting, and I should go somewhere, and if I should happen to be pregnant he will arrange for—"

"Milo. I'm on my way to visit a man named Milo Foster. Is he—?"

"David's father," the girl said.

"Were you married to David?"

The girl shook her head. "David thought it wouldn't be fair. He thought it might happen just the way it has happened. He'd turn up missing, or something, and I'd be tied to a ghost—that was the way he put it. But he gave me all he had. This shack his father gave him when he was a kid, and Igor. And the money from the Jaguar. And it's almost a year now."

She glanced down at the body of the dog. "Maybe it's the best way out for poor Igor. Because there isn't much money left and soon I might've had to turn Igor over to the SPCA. That would have killed him because David told him to stay with me and he did, every minute of every day and night—until tonight. If Igor had any time to think about it before he died, he must have thought God had struck him dead for disobeying David's orders."

"You loved David?"

"If he had asked me to lie down and let a truck run over me I would have. Loved him?" Her voice rose. "He was the only decent thing that ever happened to me in my whole life—him and Igor. So I will wait here for him forever—or until the Army changes the word 'missing' to 'killed in action.' As long as there's a chance for him to come back I'll be here when he comes. No matter what Milo does! No matter what!"

Jericho drew a deep breath. "My name is Jericho," he said. "John Jericho. I'm a painter."

Her eyes widened. "David was a painter, too," she said.

"I know."

"You've seen his work?" Her excitement was high.

"No. But Milo Foster is giving a new wing to a museum in David's name. That's why I'm on my way to see him. To arrange the details."

She seemed to freeze. "Does he know David is dead and hasn't told me?"

"I don't know."

Her hands reached up and touched the sodden lapels of his tweed jacket. "Will you find out? Will you please, please find out for me? Because if David is

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dead and Igor is dead—"

"What will you do?"

"I don't know," she said vaguely. "Go back to where I was—or maybe take a handful of sleeping pills. I don't know."

"What's your name? You haven't told me, you know."

"Angel Kelly," she said.

A flash of lightning revealed the Foster mansion. Jericho had the absurd notion that he was looking at the castle of the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*—turrets, towers, battlements. Lights blazed in dozens of windows.

The violence of the storm had decreased by now, the lightning being of the "heat" variety. The wind had let up, but the rain was still heavy and steady. Jericho glanced at the clock on the dashboard of the Mercedes. It was just a few minutes past midnight.

As Jericho pulled up at the front of the house a man in a black slicker and black rainhat came running down a short, wide flight of stone steps carrying a bright-colored golf umbrella.

"Mr. Jericho?" A dark face peered through the side window of the car.

"Yes."

"Mr. Foster was very worried about you, sir," the man said. "He was about to alert the State Police. Your bags, sir?"

"In the trunk," Jericho said.

"If you'll give me the keys, sir, I'll get them. You take the umbrella."

Milo Foster was impressive. He couldn't quite match Jericho's six feet four inches, but he was almost as broad and powerful-looking, even though he was ten years older. Curly white hair glittered in the bright lights of a huge entrance hall. Behind him on the stuccoed walls Jericho recognized a priceless Velasquez and a Chagall he had never known existed.

Foster's smile was white and wide, his handshake rock-hard. "My dear fellow, I'm relieved to see you," he said. His face clouded. "You're soaking wet, man. Tire trouble?"

"A small adventure, thanks to a filling-station man who assured me there was a short cut over the mountain."

"On a night like this? Idiot." He turned to the black-slickered man who appeared with Jericho's bags. "Take Mr. Jericho's bags to his room, Max. See that he has what he needs. I recommend a good solid whiskey or brandy, Jericho. Can I have some food ordered for you?"

"A drink would be fine," Jericho said. "And a hot shower."

He followed the slickered

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Max to the foot of a wide winding stairway—and was confronted by a vision. His painter's eye told him he was looking at one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. She was dark, tanned by the sun, tall, lithe, with a magnificent figure that was not hidden by a bright scarlet floor-length housecoat.

"Miss Arabella Khalkis—Mr. John Jericho," Foster said.

The girl's smile was dazzling.

Miss Khalkis is—was—David's fiancée," Foster said. "Mr. Jericho will join us in the library when he's had a chance to get into some dry clothes, my dear."

"I look forward to that," Arabella Khalkis said. "I'm a great admirer of your painting, Mr. Jericho."

"I am instantly an admirer of yours, Miss Khalkis."

She looked pleased. Khalkis? It rang some sort of bell in Jericho's memory. One of the Greek industrial tycoons? If so, Arabella must be the heiress to a fabulous fortune. It would seem that drowned rat of a girl in that miserable shack in the woods, crooning over the body of a dead dog, could never have provided a moment's competition for Arabella Khalkis.

Max took Jericho to a high-ceilinged bedroom. Again there were paintings—a Benton, a Wyeth. Foster's interest in art was genuine, his taste impeccable. There was a fully stocked portable bar next to a giant fourposter. Max put the bags on a folding rack, then opened the door to a bathroom, revealing a black marble tub as large as a small swimming pool.

"Would you like to soak in the tub, sir, or would you prefer to use the shower?"

"The shower will be fine," Jericho said.

"Can I make you a drink, sir?"

Jericho glanced at the bar. "Bourbon on the rocks, please." Max, he saw, with his rainhat removed, was handsome in a way—dark, aquiline, only a thin scar running from the corner of one eye up into the coal-black hairline spoiling a kind of rugged perfection.

"You had trouble on the mountain, sir?"

"I ran into someone who had trouble," Jericho said.

The black eyes narrowed. "A girl, sir?"

Something warned Jericho. "A dog," he said. "Run over by someone in the storm."

"I see." Max drew a deep breath. "You'll find the library across the hall to the right when you come downstairs, sir."

"Thanks," Jericho said.

A steaming hot shower, dry

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clothes, and a stiff drink made a new man of Jericho. He found Foster and the beautiful Arabella in a book-lined library. There was another portable bar, and on a side table were a cold ham, cheeses, breads, crackers, olives, shrimps with a Russian-dressing dip. Arabella sat in a high-backed armchair next to a low-burning fire. The flickering flames cast mysterious light changes on her lovely face.

"Max tells me that you came on an injured dog on the mountain road," Foster said.

Jericho crossed to the bar and made himself a drink. He was aware of being watched closely. "A dead dog," he said. He poured bourbon on the rocks. "The girl is alive." He turned and looked at his host and Arabella. Foster's smile was gone, Arabella's expression was unchanged—a kind of mysterious inner amusement.

"I almost ran over the girl," Jericho said. "She was sitting in the middle of the road holding the dog in her arms."

"Too bad," Foster said. "The dog was a valuable dog, extremely well-bred."

"Unlike the girl," Arabella said, smiling into the fire.

A small muscle rippled along Jericho's jaw, under the red beard. "I found the girl refreshingly loyal," he said.

"So you met Miss Angel Kelly," Foster said.

"I met her."

"Most extraordinary and inexplicable situation," Foster said. "Would you believe it, Jericho, that the first night David met her he paid her for the time they spent together?"

"A common tramp," Arabella said.

"There's essentially no difference between the street girl who demands five dollars on the barrelhead," Jericho said, "and the society girl who insists on cocktails, caviar, and a visit to the Royal ballet before she says 'yes.' "

"Even five dollars would seem to be an exhorbitant price to pay for that scrawny little plucked chicken," Arabella Khalkis said.

"But loyalty can't be bought," Jericho said.

"Loyalty!" Foster exploded. "She's sitting there, waiting for the news that David is dead. She thinks then I will pay her to get out of my sight."

"Then why don't you tell her the boy is alive?" Jericho said, deadly quiet.

"If only we knew," Arabella said.

"Where have you got him hidden?" Jericho asked.

Foster's face had turned to stone. "What are you talking about?"

"The fact that you can't buy

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loyalty," Jericho said. "The girl has it. The dog had it. Is David here in the house now?"

"He's missing in action—in Vietnam," Foster said.

"Are you trying to convince me he's not here?"

"You're out of your mind, Jericho!"

"You can't buy loyalty, particularly from a dog," Jericho persisted. "That retriever had never gone twenty yards away from Angel Kelly until tonight. Whom would he leave her for?"

"Another dog," Arabella said.

"I think not. I think the dog left Angel Kelly to follow his master—David."

"*She* told you that? The girl told you she'd seen David?" Foster exchanged a quick glance with Arabella.

"She didn't see him," Jericho said. "I suspect he went to see her. Maybe, in view of your plans for him, he just meant to catch a glimpse of her without her knowing. Maybe you discovered he was missing, went after him, and got to him before he could reach the cabin. But the dog sensed his nearness."

Foster stood very straight and still. "You have come here as my guest, Mr. Jericho. We have tried to offer you every courtesy. You repay us with this lunacy. Arabella and I have both suffered too much from the tragedy of David's probable death to be subjected to this cruel and senseless melodrama. I must ask you to leave."

"I offer you an alternative," Jericho said. "Let me search the house for David. Otherwise I will have the proper authorities here with the proper warrants before you can whisk him away to some Greek island paradise—which I take is your plan."

The door to the library opened and the man called Max came in. He was wearing a dark suit with a black turtlenecked sweater. He had a machine pistol tucked under his arm. Jericho smiled at him.

"I see you are readier to believe I mean business, Max, than your employers are," he said.

"Why, Jericho? Why?" Foster cried out in a shaken voice.

"I'm an admirer of loyalty," Jericho said. "The dog and the girl are getting short-changed for theirs."

Arabella leaned her dark head back against the high-backed chair, still smiling. "Have you ever heard of Theofiledes Khalkis, Mr. Jericho? He is my father. He has money enough to buy anything he wants. He was even able to buy David's release from a Vietcong prison camp."

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"Then why not a ticker-tape parade up Broadway? Escaped war hero! No, Miss Khalkis, David is a deserter and you and your father—and his father—are helping him to avoid the consequences."

"Have you no sympathy, no pity?" Foster cried. His rock-hard exterior was crumbling.

"Yes, I have sympathy for any man who wants to get out of a war," Jericho said. "I just might turn my back on his efforts to escape such a horror. But he said to the dog, 'Stay till I come back,' and he said to the girl, 'Stay till I come back,' and they both did exactly what he asked. And now he will slip away without their knowing—at least for a long time—that they have been discarded. I don't choose to turn my back on that, Foster. Quixotic? Perhaps, but that's the way it is."

"What is your price, Mr. Jericho?" Arabella asked. "Every man has his price."

"And your father can pay whatever it is?"

"Yes."

"Your father couldn't pay my price," Jericho said.

"What is it?"

"David Foster must go to that cabin in the woods. He must help the girl bury their dog. And then he must tell her that he no longer cares for her, that he chooses freedom and the glamorous Miss Khalkis. I think Angel Kelly might understand that—but she must be told by him. That is my price, Miss Khalkis."

"There is another alternative, Miss Khalkis," Max said quietly. He lifted the machine pistol. "Let me use this."

"Does your father also pay your gunman, Miss Khalkis?" Jericho asked.

Arabella rose and stood, straight and lovely, by her chair. "Everything in the world is paid for by someone who wants it badly enough, Mr. Jericho," she said. "I want David, and my father will pay anything required to get him for me. Your disappearance might cause a ripple or two, but no one in the world could trace it to this house or to us."

"Then you'd better get on with it," Jericho said, "because you can't count on any promise I might make you under pressure." He had gauged the distance between himself and Max and he knew he could never cover even the few feet of Turkish rug and stay alive.

"I'll give you one last reasonable argument," Arabella said. "I admit that David had doubts. He didn't want to go away without explaining to that little tramp in the mountain cabin. We made it clear to him that if he saw her she could ruin his

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chances of getting away. He finally seemed to see the light, but when we had relaxed he took off for the mountain. Max went after him, but it proved to be unnecessary. David got to the shack, peered through the window at her, and knew that he had been dreaming a false dream. He came away without letting her know he'd been there. He had made his choice."

"Then he was a damn fool," Jericho said. "Maybe Angel Kelly is better off. Any man who would choose to be a pet poodle on a Greek island instead of a real man living with a real woman deserves someone like you, Miss Khalkis."

"You are being a foolish, old-world knight in shining armor, Mr. Jericho. Why on earth should you give up your life for that stupid slut?"

"Because I would have to live with myself if I let you have your way," Jericho said.

Arabella turned with a weary shrug of her lovely shoulders. "Take him away, Max. Do what has to be done," she said.

"No!" Foster cried out. "Not murder. There has to be some other way."

"Max!" Arabella said.

"Come on, buster," Max said to Jericho, the machine pistol aimed at Jericho's heart.

"You're going to have to do it here, Max, right on the Turkish rug. I want Foster and Miss Khalkis to live with the picture of it for the rest of their lives."

Arabella turned again, her eyes blazing. "If it must be that way, so be it. Max!"

Okay, Jericho thought, his muscles tensing, I can at least die rushing him.

There was a sharp knock at the library door. It opened and a maid in a black and white uniform came into the room.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, Mr. Foster," she said, "but Mr. David said I should give you this immediately." She crossed to Foster and handed him a folded piece of paper. She seemed not to see Max or the machine pistol. Then she turned and hurried out of the room.

Foster unfolded the paper. A nerve twitched high up on his cheek. A great physical weariness seemed about to overcome him. He steadied himself with a hand on the back of a chair. His voice was low and hoarse as he read aloud.

" 'Father: I have been listening, and Jericho has made it clear to me what a heel I've been. I have betrayed the only two people who really love me. Poor Igor! He followed me home after my cowardice and Max ran him down. Igor's presence here would have been a giveaway, wouldn't it? And

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Max would have killed Angel if she had seen me! Well, it's too late now, Father. I've gone back to the mountain and I'm going to turn myself in. If I have to pay for Angel and her loyalty with a piece of my life in jail it will be worth it . . . David.' "

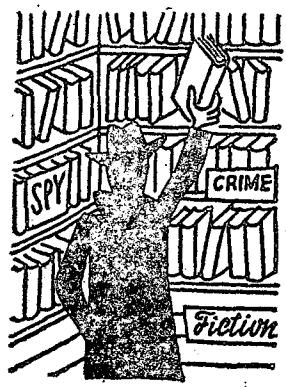
"Idiot!" Arabella said.

"Surely you wouldn't want an idiot for a husband, would you, Miss Khalkis?" Jericho said. He was smiling.

"Get out!" Arabella said.

"Thanks," Jericho said. He glanced at Foster. "I think you can start being proud of your boy." He moved toward the door. Max had turned his head toward Arabella, expecting some last-minute change of heart. Jericho's move was deadly. He ripped the machine pistol out of Max's hands. His right fist struck with sledge-hammer force to the man's jaw, hurtling him back against the wall where he slid down and lay still.

"That, friend, is for the dog," Jericho said, and walked out of the room without looking back.



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a **NEW** ***Reno story by***

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Florence V. Mayberry has a "way with her" when she writes about Reno and the Nevada scene. We know of no other writer who generates quite the same emotional impact, casts quite the same spell . . . In "To Find a Millionaire," Florence V. Mayberry tells a curiously claustrophobic story. Its lingering bittersweetness, its "floating, spinning, whirling," and most of all, its inherent sense of evil, may make you shiver—a little . . .

TO FIND A MILLIONAIRE

by FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

I came into Reno on a bus. From Sacramento. Of course, Sacramento had been just one more stop on my way up from Bakersfield, Delano, Fresno. Out of cotton fields, vineyards, hamburger joints, cheap night clubs.

I asked around Reno that day about where there might be a good place for a girl to get a job. Dancing. Singing was out—I croak like a young boy just as his voice is thinking about changing. But it sounds okay when I talk. Throaty, sort of.

Well, I got talking to a fellow, old guy maybe 35, at a lunch counter. He said he was a dealer in one of the gambling clubs. I didn't like his looks. He had a tight face, not bad-looking, but tight like something inside of him had been pulled into a hard knot. And his eyes had a slithery feel on me. But he was somebody who seemed to know his way around Reno.

I told him I was a pretty good dancer, that I'd danced in California clubs. He said there was a place in town called Sadie's Stable, and Sadie the boss was always looking for pretty kids. "I've got a night off coming up," he said. "Like tonight. Why don't I take you out and show you off? And if you don't make it at Sadie's, you might try for a job shilling—hey, how old are you anyway?"

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"Twenty-one," I said. It was a lie. Seven more months and I would be 18.

"Yeah," he said. "Sure you are. You just look young for your age. About the only way you can get inside Sadie's is if you land a job there, you look too young for a customer. Well, we can try. Anyway, how about a date tonight? I'll take you to Sadie's and she can look you over in her office."

He tried for a big generous-hearted smile. But his face was too tight. And I'm sitting there wondering what kind of a commission he's planning on asking.

"You'll get the job," he said. "You've got everything. Shape, looks, and if you can dance too, man! Anyway, honey, if you don't get the job there's nothing to worry about. Nothing. Not as long as old Harry has a job. And I get paid good."

So I knew his name. Harry. And I was getting filled in about that commission.

Harry and I went out to Sadie's Stable that night. I met him on a street corner I picked out. Down near the bus station. It was none of Harry's business where I lived. Or that I didn't live anywhere. I took my suitcase out of the checking locker at the bus station, and washed up and changed clothes in the Ladies john. Messy place. Women crowding in while I was changing.

Of course I didn't own the john, so I had no right to complain. But that didn't help. I never could stand being crowded up with people. I hate dirt and lack of privacy. All my life I've had a lot of the first, and nothing much of the second.

Sadie was big and blonde and her voice was rough from singing and fighting her way through a lifetime of show business and night clubs. She threw her arms around me at first sight and smacked me on the cheek. It made me shiver. I just can't stand being pawed at.

"Honey, you were made for Sadie's place. Say, kid, lift your skirt, let's see your legs. Yeah, okay, fit the rest of you. Harry, lookit that long shiny black hair and those slanty blue eyes, really something. You say you can dance, what kinda dancing?"

Any kind, I told her. You ask for it, I'll give it to you.

That was no lie. I never had many lessons. Foster parents aren't usually keen on laying out extra money for dancing lessons. But one set did for a while. After that, I looked up dancing schools wherever I was and just walked in, sat down, and watched while the classes were going on. A couple of

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them put me out, but all the others just let me alone. So I watched.

Then I went wherever I could that was private and I practised. Usually it was the gym in the grammar schools—I never made but one year of high school. I told the gym teacher I was practising for a program. I was. A program like getting a fancy job so I could quit being a foster kid, and rent a room all by myself, and finally find a rich man who would love me like crazy because I danced so good, and marry me and give me all his money. Somehow, in all my dreams, the guy himself somehow got lost.

"Okay, honey," Sadie said. "You can work out for me tomorrow afternoon. Show up here at three."

Harry squeezed my arm as we left Sadie's office and went to the Stable's entrance. You know something? It was a laugh. The doorman wouldn't let me in. Said I was too young or else show proof I wasn't. I had a job there, but couldn't get in as customer.

"That's okay, honey," Harry said, smiling like he had just eaten something that tasted good. "We'll go on up to my apartment and hoist a few."

"I don't drink," I said. In one of my foster homes the man took spells of lying in bed for weeks nursing on a bottle. Of whiskey. "I don't drink, unless you're talking about milk."

"Honey, I'll go milk the cow myself," Harry said. "Now listen, baby, let's straighten this out right at the start. Don't try to be wise. I got down early on that corner tonight to meet you. And I saw you come out of the bus station. So I've got a hunch you're broke and don't have any place to stay. So why not make my place your headquarters?"

"Well, no, I couldn't do that." I could feel my eyes slant even more than the way they were born, like they do when I start getting mad. Who knows, maybe one of my grandpas or grandmas was an Oriental. Seeing that I don't even know if I had any parents, maybe just grew, who knows? But I like to think I'm part Chinese. They're quiet, personal people.

"That wouldn't be right, Harry," I said. "I told you a lie. I'm really a minor. You could get in a lot of trouble."

"Who's to know?"

"Me," I said.

His voice got hard. "Listen, little gal, don't try to outsmart a grownup. Especially a grownup in my line of business in Reno. Reno runs on a big-time scale. No small-town smart-

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aleck stuff. And a kid like you, with nobody to look after her, can get hurt. Bad. Now I did you a favor. Got you a job."

"Thanks, Harry. Thank you very much. One of these days I may have to get you a job."

He drew back his hand to slap me. But some couples were walking from their cars in the parking lot toward the Stable's entrance. He put his hand down. "You want me to go tell Sadie she's in for trouble—that she's hired a minor?"

Oh, boy. And he said he was a grownup. All Sadie would have to do, with me backing her, would claim she was acting as my guardian. I said, "I'll go tell Sadie myself."

So I walked back to the office. Alone. I told her, and that I would need an advance to keep this character Harry from turning me into the cops for sleeping in a public place.

Sadie suggested I move in with some of the other kids. But I told her no, I had a thing about living with people. It was either advance me some money, or back to the bus station with Harry giving me trouble. Or maybe I could pick up some daytime housework in exchange for room and board. So she gave me an advance.

"Guts, kid," she said.

But it wasn't. It was just that I can't bear being crowded in with anyone. I'd rather go to a park and climb a tree.

I thought I'd walk into town, it wasn't so far. But Harry was waiting outside the door. "Don't be sore, Corianne." I had told him my name. Corianne Smith. Harry had on a real sweet smile and a mean glint in his eye. "You can't blame a guy for trying."

"Maybe you can't," I said. "Look, I appreciate the introduction. Maybe some day I can repay the favor. The same way. But forget anything else." I went back to Sadie, had her call me a cab. Sadie had already called up a roominghouse for me that would let me use a hot plate.

I went out the next afternoon and tried out for Sadie. She said, "You've really got it, kid. Maybe we can work out some specials for you."

Sadie's Stable was big and barny. Gaudy. Raucous. Verging on honkytonk. Not the kind of place I was headed for. But it was a start.

A start to become a top-notch headline dancer? Up the night-club route? Not much. It was my start to find one of those millionaires I'd read about in Fresno and Delano and Sacramento, wherever I'd been, living with foster families, working in the cotton or grapes or dancing in some

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little club. The California papers were always printing some big story about millionaires coming to Reno. That's why I came to Reno. To find a millionaire.

But the men who showed up alone at the Stable didn't look like millionaires. At least not the way I thought a millionaire ought to look. Dressed quiet, but rich-looking stuff, you know. With a kind of soft shine all over them and their manners, like they'd been buffed down with expensive polish. Maybe 40 or so, old enough to get all that money.

For sure Justo wasn't my type. Justo was wearing pants two sizes too big for him. His coat fit like it had been sawed off and plunked on him. Stiff boardy material. He had on a wool shirt, a wild plaid. His hair grew low on his forehead and he had bushy brows. And he was young. Maybe only 25.

Between numbers we kids in the chorus would slip on regular dresses and circulate on the dance floor. Sadie said to dance with the men who looked lonesome, so they would stay and keep on spending money. The older kids would go into the bar and get a percentage on their drinks. But Sadie told me to stay out of the bar, she didn't want to get closed down, a guardian could go just so far.

On the night Justo first came to Sadie's he was standing at the rim of the dance floor, all by himself. But he didn't look lonely. He was smiling and tapping his foot and looking like he had come with everybody. Across the dance floor, near the entrance, I saw a man standing alone looking over the place. A Cary Grant type in a good suit. To get to him I had to pass this character in the big pants and boxy coat. "Excuse me," I said.

He stepped back, smiling. Somehow his leather shoestring had come untied. It caught between the metal tap and the sole of my slipper and I tripped. Imagine, the guy was wearing ranch boots with leather shoestrings at a night club! He grabbed my shoulders and steadied me. Then is when I saw his eyes. Big and soft. Glowing and yet shy. Like a deer's eyes.

"Poor mees," he said. "Poor mees girl, you hurt? Justo got big feet." He said Justo like Hoo-sto.

Not only a guy with baggy pants, a wool shirt, and leather shoestrings, but he can't talk plain. Only, I never saw eyes like that before.

"No, not hurt," I said. "Thanks."

But his hands didn't let go. "Please. You dance weeth me. Hanh? I not speak good, I

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dance fine. Basque men dance good. You dance, hanh?"

The tall elegant man I was headed for had just been joined by a redhead, glamorous in a slinky green outfit. On top of that who should walk in past the door man but Harry. Old mean-eyed Harry. Every few nights he was doing this. Must have changed from night shift to days. A couple of times a big fat guy was with him. Once in a while another fellow. But never a girl. Now and then Harry would ask me to dance. Sadie would have given me trouble if I refused him every time. So I danced with him when I couldn't avoid it. Made me crawl. Honest. His touch was just like eyes.

"Okay," I said to Justo.

Justo was not much taller than I was. I'm five five. Maybe he was five eight. And built square, like his coat. Not fat, just square. When I put my hand on his shoulder it was like resting it on an iron shelf. But when he began to dance he was eiderdown. Somehow he seemed to operate on a levitation principle so that his feet, boots and all, moved about a half inch off the floor, all the time.

He swept me into a whirl, spun into some crazy step, part jump, part slide. We floated, spun, whirled, and in between the soft lightness of that there would be a hard staccato step. And all the time he held me a little apart from him, his hand firm and yet light on my back. It was almost like not being touched.

It was such fun, dancing with this strange funny man with the beautiful eyes. It made me laugh.

When the music stopped, sweat was dripping down his cheeks. But you know something? That man smelled like sage. Like the outdoors, fresh and clean. I smiled, and started to leave the floor.

"Pleese, mees girl," he said. "Dance more. My name Justo, you' name please?"

"Corianne." Actually it's Cora Anne.

So we danced again. It was a crazy thought, but I thought it's like dancing with a mountain goat, leaping from crag to crag, all spring, no weight. Or with that Greek god they're always comparing to a goat who tootles on something.

Then we danced again.

Sadie sent one of the kids after me. Sadie was kind of burned when she talked to me. "What's a beautiful kid like you doing messing around with a sheepherder? Bartender says he's a Basque sheepherder. You wanna go out in the hills and herd sheep? Listen, Corianne,

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you got everything going for you—talent, looks, and Sadie to back you up. And, listen, if you wanna waste time, whyn't you dance once in a while with Harry? He's complaining around, he brought you out here and now you won't give him hardly a look. If he thinks I back you up in that, he's gonna pass around the word this is a lousy joint. And I got news for you. Harry's only a dealer, but it happens he's real buddy-buddy with the owner of his club.

"And listen, Corianne, something else which may mean something for you. His boss give me a ring, says he's taken a shine to you. He was out here a coupla nights with Harry. You be nice to Harry, you're liable to end up with the boss, how's that, kid?"

Money, I thought. That's how's that. And then I thought, gee, the fat guy. And for all I knew, if you came close to him, he'd be a creep like Harry, with slick eyes and crawly hands.

Now that a rich man was interested in me I should have been glad. Instead, I got a funny feeling in my stomach. Like sick. Like, what would I do if a man like that put his hands on me when I don't like to be touched.

Funny. I kept thinking how clean that Basque sheepherder was, his hands light and his whole heart and body in that crazy leaping dance.

But man oh man, a sheepherder!

I kept a regular taxi call, for a cab to take me home after I was through work. But on this night there at the door was Harry. He smiled like a knife split his face open and he was going to kill the guy who did it.

"Corianne, I've got a friend out here—" He jerked his thumb toward a big black sedan. "Let's the three of us go out to a real place, see a high-class joint for a change. You're probably hungry, we'll buy you the best meal in town."

A big shadowy figure was behind the steering wheel of the sedan. Money. That's what I wanted. But nobody tangible with it. Just money. Rich. Not fat and strange, and a buddy of a guy like Harry. Maybe they would put me between them in the front seat. Crowded. Trapped.

"Thanks," I said. "But I need my sleep."

My taxi showed up just then. I ran to it and jumped in.

The next night this Justo was at the Stable again. He stood on the sidelines, looking shy, his tight curly hair ringing his forehead, a bashful smile turning up his lips. By that time

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Sadie was having me do a short solo number in front of the chorus. Whistles went up. I saw Justo's head fling from one side to the other. His jaw was set, thrust forward. He looked angry, like something dirty had been done. To me. I knew it was to me.

As soon as we kids came out on the dance floor after our number, Justo walked straight to me and asked me to dance. He danced slower this time, his face serious. And he held me in an Old Country way, apart from him. "You marry with me," he said flatly. No question. Just said it.

It was such a serious statement of fact that somehow "No" couldn't come out of me. I asked, "Why?"

"Because you yong girl, this no place for you. Justo halp you, take care. You fine strong girl, halp Justo."

I laughed. Not *at* him. He was too nice, too earnest for that. So he would know I wasn't making fun of him, I patted his cheek. "What a sweet guy," I said.

Justo caught me in those iron arms and spun me around the floor with such leaps and whirls that some of the dancers stood aside and applauded.

"Hey, hey, Justo, they'll toss you out!" I warned him.

He slowed down. "Pleese, mees. Tonight. We marry tonight."

"And go live in a sheep camp?"

He looked as though I had slapped him. "You no like?"

"Look, Justo. I'm a poor kid. All my life I'm a poor kid. And in and out of that life I've scrounged around ranch camps. Picked grapes, picked cotton, hoed weeds. It was worse than the places I lived in in towns. I don't want any more of that."

He looked around this crummy night club, all purple and red and green lights, flash and glitter, gunky marbelized mirrors. "This better than sheep camp?"

"I don't know. Maybe not."

"Then why you stay?"

How do you put it across to a nice guy who likes you that you're looking for a rich guy who can give you money? A big fancy house with polished furniture, thick rugs, lots of bathrooms. Room for privacy.

I just shrugged.

At the end of the dance Justo thanked me. Formally. And left. He didn't show up the next night, or the next. But Harry did. I danced with him once, to make Sadie happy. He pulled me tight against his chest, his hand working around my back.

"How about that dinner tonight?" he asked. "I can give

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my friend a ring, he's anxious to meet a girl like you who keeps herself special."

It sounded wrong. Two men buddy-buddy being interested in the same girl. Like I said, I was only 17, but I'd had a long hard life of watching how things went.

I shook my head, as best I could, the way I was squeezed tight against his chest.

Harry's hand that was holding mine turned my hand back towards my wrist, then twisted it sideways. Just before it hurt too bad he let go. "Smart kids with no sense like you can get hurt. Bad. Why don't you wise up? That is, if you plan to stay in Reno and make a living. Now be sensible. And nice. My boss has a lot of pull around here. You'd be surprised how much pull."

I brought the heel of my slipper down hard on his toes. It had a metal tap on it. Then I whirled and walked away.

Four nights after Justo vanished, my regular taxi call showed up at Sadie's about three in the morning. I climbed in. It was a new cab and a new driver. His face was turned away from me but I could tell by the shape of his head and back it was a new cabbie. So I gave him my address. He nodded, backed out, swerved toward the highway.

Then something about the set of his shoulders rang a bell. I edged around until I could see his profile. It was Justo.

"Justo! What are you doing with this taxi? You're a sheep man, what are you doing with this kind of job?"

"Now I gotta new job," Justo said. "In city, fine city, like you. Justo be big fine city fell-ho, no more sheep. And every night I drive you home."

He stopped in front of my place, got out, opened the door for me. He patted the taxi's hood. "Purty, hanh, no?"

So, a shiny new taxi. "Well, thanks, Justo. But I feel bad about you doing this. You don't belong in a town."

"Oh, sure, I be fine guy now. No dirty sheep. Nice clean people. So, every night I pick you hup, take you home, see you safe."

I froze. Just like the other guys. Everywhere. "Thanks. No. I'll take myself home and see myself safe."

You know what Justo did? He slapped me. First on one cheek, then the other. Not fast. Not hard. Deliberate and controlled. Then he took my hand and led me up the apartment house steps. At my door he said, "You domb girl, you don' onnerstan' Justo. Maybe now you marry? Now? Tonight?"

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I could see how he meant it. But I was mad just the same. I wanted to slap him back. But something told me I had better not, I might get the licking of my life. So I just slammed the door on him.

The following night, along about eight, when it came time for me to go out to the Stable for the dinner show, a taxi was waiting outside. The regular call. Justo was driving again.

"Justo, you might as well stop this. Quit this silly job and go back to your sheep camp. I'm *not* going to marry you."

"You be bad girl then?" Justo said over his shoulder as we headed towards Virginia Street. "Pretty girls need hoosban'."

Oh, damn him! This sweet guy, this sweet sheepherder character wanted to take care of me. So had lots of other guys. But not in Justo's way. Not like Justo.

I leaned forward and spoke close to his ear. "Justo, please. Listen, Justo, I'm leveling with you. I'm a poor kid. No family. No nothing. An orphan kid. I've been crowded against, given leftovers, never had any room for myself, fought passes ever since I knew what passes were. But now I'm grownup. I'm going to make myself the kind of life I want."

"I give it to you," Justo said.

"No, Justo, you can't. Not what I want. Everything rich. Never have to look inside any crummy night club, hash house, cotton field ever again. I want a rich husband, gorgeous clothes, and a big house to match. A house with so much room I'll rattle inside it, with maybe two bathrooms all my own, one for morning and one for night. And maybe I never will have any company. Just live nice and quiet. Private."

"Not even you' hoosban' there? Where you find a man like that?"

I put my face on the back of the front seat and cried, and cried. Where would a punk kid like me find a man like that? Was there even a man like that in all the world? Even a rich man would want to be in all my rooms. Touching me. Pawing at me.

Justo was quiet until I pulled myself together. "Wipe you' nose," he said. "Tell that fat old lady you quit now. We marry, we go out sheep camp. Nice and quiet. No bat-room, but plenty room. No company, I tell the boys go out other camp. But one t'ing for sure, you' hoosban' be there."

"Justo, you nut!" I began to laugh. Sweet, yes. But, oh boy! Full steam down a monorail. "Hurry up, I'll be late for work."

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That damn Harry was out at Sadie's that night. Came in about midnight. I looked to see if the fat man was with him. But no. Just Harry.

I stayed in the dressing room instead of going out with the kids to dance with the customers. But Sadie ran me out with the others.

First thing, there was Justo, right in front of me, holding out his arms to dance. Sadie's muscle boy stepped between us. He had on a smooth smile for the benefit of the customers but his eyes were like icepicks. "New rule, kid," he said to me. "Sadie just made it. From now on you only dance with the guys she picks. And as for you, shepherd boy, out!" He grabbed Justo's arm.

Justo's stocky body wrenched away. He leaped back, then forward like a charging bull. His head butted the big man's belly. Almost at the same time he swerved and his foot came up hard. The muscle man went down, moaning.

I saw Harry walk fast over to the bartender, and then the bartender reached under the bar. I knew Sadie had him keep a gun there. I shoved in front of Justo and yelled at the bartender, "You shoot him, I'll swear it's murder!"

Justo spoke quietly, with authority. He said, "This my wife. Call you' cops. I close this place. Use little yong girls."

Sadie was out now, a smile cracking through her makeup. She raised her hands towards the crowd. "Okay, folks, just a little family misunderstanding, thass all folks, let's all give these kids a toast they'll be happy ever after from now on, seems a wedding got mixed in here we didn't know about."

She turned to me, the smile still wide. Under her breath she said, "Take your damn sheepherder and get outa here!"

"I want my money!"

"I'll send it tomorrow, all your stuff, just get outa here!"

Justo took my hand. Man! It was a long walk out, some of the folks laughing, some man yelling, "Don't blame you, guy, if she was mine, I wouldn't let anybody look at her. Except me."

Outside, Justo walked me to the taxi. It was way at the back of the lot out of sight of the entrance, only it and one other car in that back section. I thought, oh boy, will that taxi company ever give him fits, keeping his taxi off duty while he goes nightclubbing.

Beside the taxi Justo took both of my hands and looked at me. "Justo," I said, "you're going to get in trouble with your boss, keeping that taxi off duty."

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"Don' fear, sweet Mees Cory." The light was faint, the night dark, but I could see him smile. "Like I tol' you, this my taxi. You' taxi now. I buy. So I take you home at night, see you safe." He was quiet a moment. It was too dark to see clearly those luminous fawn eyes of his, but I could feel them, looking deep into me. "Justo rich. Now got taxi. T'ree hundred sheep my own, some day more. Yes, you my wife? For sure?"

I shook my head. "No, Justo." I began to cry. "No, Justo. I won't marry you."

We were so intent with each other that we didn't see Harry until he was right beside us. Then two strange characters crawled out of the car parked nearby. It was so dark we hadn't seen them.

"That's what I thought," Harry said. "You're not married. This dumb hick was just saving his skin."

Justo catapulted towards him and knocked him down. The two characters grabbed Justo. They were huge, tall and wide. One of them slammed his fist in Justo's mouth, smack! And then a bubbly sound. In the dark the men's figures moved like shadows. Short stocky Justo butted one, leaped and kicked at the other. Then Harry came behind Justo. There was a thud. Justo went down to his knees. Another thud and he toppled over.

I started around the taxi, headed for Sadie's to call the police. When I came around it, Harry caught me. He was no match for a trained dancer. I stomped on his foot, kicked his other shin, and took off—right into the arms of one of the gorillas. When I tried to stomp on his foot he lifted me off the ground with one arm, the other hand over my mouth.

He squeezed my face so hard I could scarcely breathe. He carried me to his car. Harry and the other big man put Justo in the taxi.

We drove in both cars out of Reno, out towards Lovelock. Then on a side road, far into the desert country. Nobody there. No houses—at least, none with lights. No cars. The taxi turned off the road. Then they focused the headlights of the car I was in on the taxi's gas tank and fooled around with it. Draining it. No gas. So Justo couldn't drive back to Reno when he came to.

Harry hadn't said much on the way out. The little he said, I wouldn't answer. But now he put on the sweet helpful-guy act. "This is for your own good, kid, you don't want to get tied up with a flock of sheep, a smart city kid headed for big

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time like you. Listen, honey, we were a little rough tonight, but you're hard to convince. I've been trying to tell you, not only do I go for you, but my boss—well, you'd be surprised how much he's had his eye on you. You're what he wants. And believe me, he usually gets what he wants. He has a lot of investment in this state, he knows a lot of big people. You be nice to him, kid, you play your cards right, and the state's yours."

I kept thinking, so this is how it's done—this is how a punk kid like me gets a rich man. Through the back door. Roughed up. Pawed at. Slammed around. All I'd thought about before was finding a rich husband. A husband. Vague, with no hands, like a man in a dream.

I wanted to say, to hell with you and your boss. But with those three men in the car, with no room to run or kick, and out on a lonely desert road, and with Justo knocked out—forget it! So I just sat there, quiet, waiting.

They drove back, fast. Stopped in Sparks. It looked like we might be back of a bar, on the edge of town. Harry went inside. He came back, smiling like a nice old uncle going to give his niece a Teddy bear. "The boss'll be out at his place right away. So we'll go out there and talk things over. Wait till you see the fancy layout he's got. Out at the edge of the mountains."

My God! Then, later, maybe dropped over the side of a cliff! I opened my mouth to scream. And got it clamped shut. Harry's smile tightened. No Teddy bear. "Listen, kid, get some sense. You're an orphan. No family. Sadie told me she was playing guardian for you. So there's nobody but Sadie and your landlady to ask any questions about you. Sadie's washed her hands of you. And your landlady will think you skipped town like a lot of kids do who hit Reno. Just nobody, but nobody, to ask questions about you. So why don't we play it happy. And healthy."

So this is the way you get rich?

I began to gag. The hand on my mouth loosened. I gagged, and retched. "Hell!" Harry said. "Get her out on the ground!"

One of the big men opened the door and lifted me out. He held my shoulders. I bent over, retching, jerking against his hands. His hands eased. When they were slack enough I sprang forward, ran towards the alley, screeching every step.

I felt something hit the back of my head . . .

When I came to, we were

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turning into a driveway. Somewhere. Scrub trees were all around, sprinkled with a few big ones. We stopped at a big dark house, with only a few lights showing. We went in.

It was really swank in a rich log-cabiny style, but my head hurt too much for me to pay much attention. They led me to a room towards the back with mountain lion heads, elephant tusks, tiger skins all over. Everything dead. The fattest man I ever saw was sitting in a big chair. A fat man with a face like a wicked old cherub with beady black eyes.

He stood up and waddled over to me. He could see I had been roughed up. In a gentle voice so cold it made my spine turn to ice he told them what bums they were. Then he spoke to me in that same soft icy voice—I felt if I heard it long enough it might hypnotize me—told me to sit down, not to be afraid.

Suddenly there was a drink in front of me. I shook my head. Harry said, "This kid doesn't drink."

The fat man gently told me how much he admired that.

Then there was a cup of coffee in front of me.

I finally talked. "I won't touch it, and I won't talk with them—" pointing to Harry and the other two—"in the room."

So the nice fat man lovingly told them to get the hell out.

I sat there for a minute or so, long enough for Harry and the men to get good and gone. I smiled at the fat man, and he smiled back. Then I threw the hot coffee in his face, grabbed my shoe, and hit him on the head with its heel. Hard. Remember, there was a metal tap on the heel.

He sputtered at the coffee, ready to yell. I hit him again. I don't know how many times I hit him. His head was bleeding all over the leather sofa that he fell on. He lay still. Then he moved, and I hit him again. After that, he stayed still.

I took off my other shoe, opened a window, and climbed out. My stockinged feet only made a whisper of sound over the rocks and brush. The dark was more solid now, like it gets just before it turns light in the morning. It was hard to find my way, especially since I didn't know where my way was. I didn't feel particularly tired—only like nothing, but nothing, mattered much any more.

The sky began to lighten and I found my way to a clear place, no big trees, only scrub. In the distance I could see the lights of Reno. So I knew in which direction I needed to walk. I walked and walked.

When the sun was up I saw

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the highway, twisting down a slope. And I heard a motor, a heavy motor, too loud for a passenger car. Then on a curve above me I saw a truck headed the way I wanted to go. I ran out on the road and flagged it. And man, oh man, did the driver ever have a ball ribbing me about having to walk home. So.

But he was nice. He let me off where I told him, a block from my room. I click-clacked home in my tap shoes, took a bath, and packed.

It was the craziest thing. Harry died. Just a few days after his boss went to the hospital with some injuries—head injuries, they were, which he had suffered while walking around his mountain property and falling to a ledge. His employees had found him down there. He was recovering.

What made it so crazy about Harry dying was what was a guy like Harry doing out on the desert? Looking for gold? A city guy like him, surrounded by all the money in the world in that gambling club? But you never can tell what wild ideas a city man can get about the wide open spaces.

The Basque sheepherders who found Harry felt bad about him. Because their sheep camp wasn't far away from the spot they found him—just far enough away so that Harry couldn't see it. If Harry had only known it, they said, he could have walked in a straight line, gone over to the camp, and got food and water. But he kept walking in circles. He must have got some foolish notion to take a hike in the desert, simply gone too far and couldn't find his way back. There were no car tracks around. What a walk the guy must have had! No wonder he got dizzy and started walking in circles.

Another thing that confused the reporter and the investigators, why did Harry keep walking, walking, instead of sitting down and taking it easy? He had worn a circle into the ground like he was a merry-go-round. And his feet were bloody, he'd finally taken his shoes off.

The Sheriff's men did find a few spent bullets here and there beyond the circle Harry had made. But not a mark on Harry. So they figured the bullets were left by some hunter taking pot shots at rabbits. The simple fact was, the crazy guy walked himself to death.

I read about Harry and his boss in the papers. Down in Sacramento. I'm carhopping down there at a hamburger joint. Out the opposite direction from the Reno highway.

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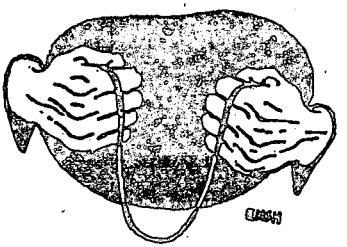
Just in case Justo's taxi might pop by sometime. Justo holds tight to an idea once he gets on it.

Really, Justo was sweet. And I can't forget those eyes. But gee, all those sheep, three hundred with wool for me to shear.

Besides, I get to thinking about that big hot lonely desert. If a person ever had to leave that sheep camp on foot, and got going in all those circles—

What I think I'll do, as soon as I save up enough money, I'll head for Florida. Not by bus. On an airplane. Fly right over Nevada.



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a NEW Miss Phipps story by

PHYLLIS BENTLEY

Miss Phipps detects again! Miss Marian Phipps—in the great 'tec tradition of spinster sleuths (and what an Old Maids Club she and Hildegarde Withers and Jane Marple and others would make!).

You know the way fictional detectives, especially the amateurs, literally attract crimes. They can't go anywhere or do anything without bumping into a mystery crying out for investigation. In this instance Miss Phipps is simply visiting her niece, on the occasion of Miss Phipps giving a talk to the Laire Women's Luncheon Club, when a strange burglary occurs—and, of course, Miss Phipps cannot resist making discreet inquiries . . .

MISS PHIPPS IS TOO MODEST

by PHYLLIS BENTLEY

Clara, the cherished housekeeper of Miss Phipps's niece, rushed into Miss Phipps's bedroom. That the housekeeper had just arrived for the morning's work was evident, for she still wore her outdoor coat. Her face was pale, her eyes and mouth were wide-open.

"Miss Phipps, Miss Phipps!" she shouted. "There's a window broken in the kitchen and your brief case thrown down and open on the floor of the study and two drawers of Mr. Dyer's desk pulled open and Mrs. Dyer's cashbox gone! And papers all over the floor! I think we've been burgled," she concluded in a quieter tone.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Miss Phipps, alarmed. "I'll come right down."

She extracted her limbs from the blankets, put on her bathrobe and her spectacles, and hurried downstairs.

"Why must they burgle the house now?" she complained angrily to herself. "Why wait

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till there's only myself and my small possessions here to steal?"

The situation was indeed embarrassing, for she felt responsible and somehow guilty.

She had come to Northshire the previous day, Thursday, to address the Laire Women's Luncheon Club today and was to stay the weekend with her niece Ruth, who now lived in an agreeable Seventeenth Century house in a village just outside the city. The first few hours of her stay had gone pleasantly. Ruth's husband, Michael Dyer, was now reasonably prosperous; their son Stephen was attending Laire University and earning very good grades; their daughter Pam, once a delicate mite, now a bouncing jolly girl, enlivened Laire Comprehensive School and was popular if not clever. Then suddenly, late Thursday afternoon, a telegram had been phoned in from Michael's sister, who lived in a Northshire seaside resort with their invalid mother, to say that old Mrs. Dyer was extremely ill and wished to see Michael, Ruth, Stephen, and Pam at once.

Michael had groaned. "I don't believe a word of it."

"No, dear," Ruth had agreed. "But we shall be obliged to go to her all the same."

She had raised her eyebrows meaningly at Miss Phipps, who understood that old Mrs. Dyer was "that kind" of mother, and had to be propitiated.

"If you ever see me beginning to behave like that to Stephen, put your foot down firmly," Ruth had said privately to her aunt, while packing.

"I will," said Miss Phipps.

"You don't mind being left alone for a night or two, do you, Aunt Marian?" Ruth asked anxiously.

"Certainly not," Miss Phipps reassured her.

"Mrs. Hoyle will look after you."

"A pleasure," said Clara—Mrs. Hoyle—beaming.

So the Dyers had packed up and left, tucking themselves into the car without more agitation and discussion than seemed natural. Clara had fed Miss Phipps an agreeable small dinner by the study fire, then washed up and gone home.

In point of fact, Miss Phipps was glad to have a little quiet time to herself, for she was tired and nervous about Friday's lecture. On Wednesday afternoon she had spent a distressing hour with an old friend named Marjorie (best not to give her full name), a writer whom Miss Phipps thoroughly respected and loved. Marjorie was unmarried, and all too evidently nearing the end of her

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life. Their talk was interrupted by an attack of the kind to which Marjorie was too often subject nowadays, and Miss Phipps had to leave on the nurse's command, with a painful premonition of farewells unsaid. Early Thursday, Miss Phipps had barely drunk her morning tea when a London newspaper phoned her, demanding an obituary. It seemed that Marjorie had died during the night.

"I'm afraid I haven't all the dates and titles of her books at hand," faltered Miss Phipps.

"We have those. All we want is a personal appreciation, a hundred words or so, from you. Telephone it," commanded the newspaper.

One hundred words did not sound like many, but by the time Miss Phipps had decided what she should say and what she should not say, written it and corrected it and telephoned it, she had quite a rush to catch the train to Northshire. Snatching her morning mail and other papers in a hurry, she discovered in the train that she had left her lecture notes behind, and had to recompose them. She did this with some trouble, then read her letters rather casually—including a most pathetic scrawled note from Marjorie in a barely legible envelope—finishing this task just before she reached Laire station.

Accordingly, Miss Phipps, enjoying a welcome rest, was dozing Thursday evening in Michael's study, after the Dyer family had left, when she was awakened by a loud untidy knocking at the front door. She stumbled up, put on the porch light, unlocked the door, and confronted two pleasant-faced schoolgirls. One wore very long fair hair; the other had an elaborate arrangement of puffs.

Miss Phipps felt saddened. In her youth, long hanging hair and elaborate puffs were regarded as symbols of female oppression, and she had engaged in a considerable war with her mother in order to be allowed to sport the short hairdo then considered avant-garde. And now all that liberty had been exchanged for these age-old—considered so new—chains. But, of course, if she had been entitled to wage war on the old generation about hairdos, so were these young things. So she smiled at them kindly. The girls giggled and asked if they could see Pam.

"I'm afraid not. Pam's grandmother is ill and they have all gone off to see her."

"Oh, what a pity!" said Long Hair, shaking her silky locks in a manner which showed much practise.

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"Could I give Pam a message?" said Miss Phipps.

Schoolgirls' heads were shaken. "We shall see her at school tomorrow."

"Would you care to leave your names?"

Heads were shaken again.

"Are you Pam's mother's aunt?" inquired Puffs.

Miss Phipps nodded.

"We're sorry to have troubled you. We just wanted to ask Pam—" began Long Hair.

"Never mind," said Puffs quickly. Obviously the frustrated communication referred to a boyfriend, thought Miss Phipps.

"Well, we're sorry to have troubled you," repeated Long Hair.

They gave Miss Phipps a look which reduced her short gray curls and neat dark frock to absurdity. Miss Phipps made an effort and smiled at them kindly again as she closed the door, and heard them giggling as they passed down the drive.

Miss Phipps at once retired to her bedroom.

She had just settled comfortably when another loud knock thudded on the front door.

Miss Phipps sighed, disentangled herself from the bedclothes, climbed slowly out of bed, drew on slippers and bathrobe, descended the stairs, put on the hall and porch lights, turned the key, and opened the door.

A slender dark young man stood before her. He was bearded, side-burned and mustached in the modern fashion, and while not quite deserving comparison with a sheepdog, was yet sufficiently ambushed in hair to make Miss Phipps sigh.

"If one could see his face he would be good-looking," she reflected. "Yes?" she said aloud.

"I was wondering if Stephen—" he began.

"Stephen's away. They are all away. Old Mrs. Dyer is ill and they have gone to see her."

"What a pity. I'm sorry to disturb you so late," said the young man. Unforgivably at this point he giggled.

Miss Phipps, who was well aware she looked antique in a pale fluffy blue bathrobe that was rather too tight for her, in pale blue slippers, long lace-trimmed nightdress, out of date spectacles and fuzzy hair, was strongly tempted to tell him she knew as well as he did that she was a figure of fun to his generation. She refrained, however, and saying coldly, "Good night," she closed and locked the door and turned out the light. She then repented of this act, which was not devoid of malice, and putting on the

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porch light again, opened the door.

"Hi! You!" she called. "Shall I give Stephen a message? What name?"

"It doesn't matter," said the young man, disappearing round the corner of the porch. He giggled again, uncontrollably, and this time the porch light went out for good.

It had been an irritating experience, and Miss Phipps took some time to throw it off and settle into sleep.

And now there was this—Clara in hysterics and the house burgled during the night! But how could any burglar have entered the house? The doors were locked; all the windows were of the narrow mullioned type and firmly secured on the inside.

"He broke one," explained Clara, showing her a shattered window in the kitchen.

"He must have very narrow shoulders to get in that way," observed Miss Phipps.

"And why not?" demanded Clara, indignant if illogical. "He's made mess enough."

The study certainly was a mess. Papers lay thick and disorderly all over the floor. Two drawers had been pulled from Michael's desk and turned upside down. The top of the desk stood open. Miss Phipps's brief case lay empty on the settee, its lock wrenched off.

"Mrs. Dyer's cashbox is gone," mourned Clara.

"Cashbox?"

"She always kept the housekeeping money in her cashbox, in Mr. Dyer's top right-hand drawer," explained Clara. "Her mother and her grandmother kept it that way, and what was good enough for them was good enough for her, she used to say."

Miss Phipps, though tired and shaken, retained her composure. She sat down and phoned the police. Two stalwart men arrived promptly, and noted down such details as were available in the absence of the Dyers. They were followed by a technician who, with powder and camera, took fingerprints on many surfaces and then asked permission to take their own. This new experience, relished by Miss Phipps, was resented by Clara.

"That's a good print," said the technician jovially about a thumbprint of Clara's. "Be careful you don't steal anything, now, or we shall have you, sure as fate."

"He shouldn't insult me like that," exclaimed Clara angrily. "*Me* steal anything! The idea!"

"He was only joking, Clara," soothed Miss Phipps.

"He's no need to joke with *me*," said the incensed Clara.

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"Look, Mrs. Hoyle," said the fingerprint man with exemplary patience, demonstrating as he spoke. "These instant photographs are of prints I have lifted, as we say, from Miss Phipps's brief case. Compare this with *this*—it obviously belongs to Miss Phipps."

"Why not?" said Clara, unpropitiated.

"And this is yours."

"I don't deny it—I took the brief case from Miss Phipps when she came in and put it on this table," said Clara, a hint of tears beginning to sound in her voice.

"And whose is this, then?"

"How should I know?"

"It might be the thief's," suggested the man gravely.

"That's no use till you've caught the thief," said Clara defiantly, determined not to be impressed. "It might be one of the Dyers' anyway—though I don't think any of them touched it," she conceded.

This discussion was fortunately interrupted by the return of all four Dyers.

"You're back! So soon!" exclaimed Miss Phipps.

It seemed that Oona—Oona was Mr. Dyer's sister—denied having sent Michael any telegram. And besides, old Mrs. Dyer wasn't ill.

"But how extraordinary!" exclaimed Miss Phipps.

"Not really, Miss Phipps," said Clara, rapidly making instant coffee for all. "You don't know old Mrs. Dyer. She'd do anything to drag Mr. Dyer to her side, *she* would."

At last the house grew calm. Coffee was gulped, a quick breakfast eaten, details were furnished—Ruth unluckily had visited the bank that afternoon, and £50 in notes had been in the vanished cashbox. Miss Phipps thought she perceived in the police reaction that this sum was not considered very large, but to the Dyers it was certainly too large a sum to lose.

"Have *you* missed anything, Aunt Marian?" asked Ruth.

"I think not. I don't really know. There were papers and letters in my brief case. They seem to be all here. My money was in my purse, and my purse was upstairs. I don't really remember."

"Good."

Michael now rushed off to his mill, taking Pam and Stephen with him to be dropped off at suitable points for school and university.

"Aunt Marian, I simply *must* go out and do some shopping. Will you come with me or stay here?"

"I think I'll stay here—I have to speak at lunchtime, remember, and I'm still rather

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flustered and confused."

"I'll come back for you at twelve prompt."

Ruth left, and Miss Phipps sat down thankfully and opened the morning paper.

"Miss Phipps, Miss Phipps!" shouted Clara from the garden.

"What now?" murmured Miss Phipps, running out to her. "What's the matter, Clara?"

"Just look at this," urged Clara, leading her to the compost heap by the back gate. "Surely that's a corner of Mrs. Dyer's cashbox? There—sticking out of those leaves."

Miss Phipps stooped. Yes, the object was undoubtedly a cashbox. She pulled it out of the surrounding rubbish. Its hinged lid fell open in her hands. The box was full of pound notes. Clara and Miss Phipps stared at each other in astonishment and alarm. Clara was pale, and Miss Phipps felt pale, too.

"We'd better count them," said Miss Phipps hoarsely.

They went indoors and did so. There were exactly £50.

"Perhaps he was afraid they could be traced," suggested Miss Phipps.

"What, one-pound notes? Phooey," said Clara practically. "But it's odd he didn't grab a few."

Miss Phipps thought it very odd.

She telephoned the police. But she did not reach the men who had visited the house, and those who now received the news sounded uninterested.

"I wish Ruth were here," she thought; as she did not know where Ruth was, she considered telephoning Michael and then decided to visit him in person.

A considerable noise of looms came from the weaving shed next door. Miss Phipps could remember a time when that noise—and therefore Michael's income—was very much smaller, and she rejoiced in the increased prosperity that the clacking shuttles indicated. Michael, however, coming out of his office, advanced on her with a slightly reserved expression which Miss Phipps understood exactly. To be interrupted by an old aunt in the middle of a weekday morning was not a businessman's idea of bliss. She smiled affectionately on him, trying to atone for her interruption by her expression.

"And what can I do for you, Aunt Marian?" said Michael politely.

"It's about the burglary," said Miss Phipps.

"Oh, don't let it worry you," said Michael soothingly. "We shall get most of the money back from our insurance, and it wasn't that much anyway."

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"You will get none of the money back," said Miss Phipps in a stern tone designed to awaken him from his business preoccupations.

"Oh?"

"Because you haven't lost any."

"I don't quite understand. Police cutting up rough, are they?"

"No. Ruth's cashbox was found by Clara an hour ago, in the compost heap."

"The thief went out that way, I suppose, by the back gate and threw the empty cashbox away as he went."

"No doubt. But the cashbox wasn't empty. It was full of notes."

"What?"

"Fifty pounds exactly. Just the sum Ruth withdrew from the bank in the afternoon."

"Well, that's good. That's splendid," said Michael, beaming.

"You don't think it's a little odd?"

"Odd? Why odd? I suppose the thief was interrupted—disturbed by some noise or something of that kind. Alarmed, he just threw the box away and hopped it. Escaped while the going was good."

"The cashbox was rather well buried in the compost."

"Clara probably did that when she found the box."

"I don't see how."

"Well, excuse me, Aunt Marian, but I'm rather busy this morning. There's the telephone again," cried Michael, turning aside with a harassed expression. "Have a talk with the police about it if you're not satisfied."

"I will," said Miss Phipps.

The more she thought about the unmercenary thief the odder she felt he was. Why break into a house, tear open drawers, empty a brief case, scatter papers over the floor, discover an old-fashioned cashbox full of money, rush off with it, and then throw the cashbox *with* the money onto a compost heap? It made no sense. Unless of course, as Michael suggested, the thief had been alarmed, disturbed. By whom, then? And surely it was *quicker* to keep the box under his arm as he ran than to take time to bury it in a rubbish heap?

"The only conclusion I can come to is that he did not *want* the money," mused Miss Phipps.

She drove off in the direction of the school which Pam attended. There was a hush, an air of concentration, about the huge multi-windowed building which intimidated Miss Phipps.

"They are in the middle of a

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lesson period," she deduced correctly.

Daunted but determined, she rang a bell, was received by a secretary, and ushered into the headmistress's office.

Miss Welbeck, in a neat gray suit, with dark smooth hair touched with gray, was pleasing, tasteful, and well-groomed in appearance; she was also courteous, even affable, but firm.

"I fear that to withdraw Pam from the classroom at this moment would arouse a good deal of inquisitive comment. Could you be more precise as to your purpose?"

Miss Phipps described the burglary and the finding of the full cashbox. Miss Welbeck was silent for a moment, then frowned.

"The circumstances do appear unusual, almost strange."

"So they do."

"What is your thought on the matter?"

"The thief did not want the money."

"Perhaps it was too small a sum to interest him."

"Possibly. Or possibly he may have wanted something else."

"Miss Phipps, I am too well aware of your reputation as a writer to take any suggestion of yours lightly"—she doesn't read detective stories, thought Miss Phipps at once—"but I must ask what do you think the thief was after?"

"Some paper perhaps."

"What kind of paper?"

Miss Phipps colored, coughed, and at length managed to get out, "A paper of examination questions, perhaps?"

"You suspect Pam of harboring such a paper?"

"Some other girl might have pushed such a paper into her schoolbag."

"Dear Miss Phipps, let me set your mind at rest. The summer-term examinations here have come and gone. Our examinations are over for the year. No paper of examination questions would have the slightest value now."

"I am delighted to hear it," said Miss Phipps happily. "It was just that two girls from your school came to see Pam last night, you see."

"Ah."

"And a young man from the university came to see Stephen."

"Ah."

There was a slight difference in the tone of this second comment which made Miss Phipps pause.

"And the Laire University examinations? They will be over, too?"

"That's not for me to say, but I should judge so. I am

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ırry to disappoint you in your ɛtective investigation, Miss ıipps," continued Miss Wel-ɛck, rising, "but on the other ınd I cannot regret that Laire ɔmprehensive is not involved any transaction with an ɛamination paper."

"I share your view whole-ɛartedly," returned Miss ıipps, courteous if untruthful. She left and drove off to the ıiversity.

Here she encountered an ɔstinate junior porter, an ɔstinate senior porter, several ɔstinate secretaries, and one or ɾo persons of higher rank and ɔliter determination. Suddenly this obstinacy yielded and nished away, and she found ɾrself in the presence of the .ce Chancellor, who could not ve been more charming.

"I enjoy your books, Miss ıipps," he said. He named the ɛest and remarked that he ıped there would be a new ɔok soon.

"I'm afraid you may think ɣ errand a foolish one, Sir ɛsmond," said Miss Phipps, ıshing.

Sir Desmond smiled affably. "In fact, I'm afraid it *is* a olish one," admitted Miss ipps.

Sir Desmond, smiling even ɔre affably, said he consid-ɛd this a stimulating opening. "Every listener would at once wish to know more. Please go on."

Miss Phipps described Ruth and Michael, Stephen and Pam, the telegram, their departure, the arrival of the two school-girls and the undergraduate, and the strange behavior of the burglar.

"Of course he *might* have been disturbed. But another hypothesis is equally tenable: he scorned the money and was looking for something else," said Sir Desmond in a tone of interest.

"Exactly."

"He took the cashbox to camouflage his real intention."

"Just so."

"He may even have wished you to *know* he scorned the money—conceit, you know. However, that is perhaps going a little too far; we do not know the thief well enough to judge. What was your first guess as to the identity of the desired object?"

"I blush to say that my first guess at identification was an examination paper. But Miss Welbeck assures me that her end-of-term examinations are over."

"It is the same with us," said Sir Desmond. Observing Miss Phipps's downcast appearance he said kindly, "My dear Miss Phipps, you are taking altogether too modest a view of

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this affair. Doesn't it strike you that the desired paper was probably one of your own?"

"I have nothing of value," said Miss Phipps.

"A holograph manuscript, perhaps?"

"You are too kind."

"I should pursue that line of investigation, if I were you," said Sir Desmond. "Have some coffee."

"At any rate," said Miss Phipps, brightening as the secretary offered her a steaming cup, "the incident will probably furnish me with a plot for a detective story."

"Just so," said Sir Desmond, beaming. "Please let me know if anything further happens."

"I should hesitate to trouble you," said Miss Phipps.

"But my dear Miss Phipps, I am dying of curiosity," said Sir Desmond.

Miss Phipps, cheered, drove rapidly home, dressed, and in her blandest tones delivered an admirable address to the Laire Women's Luncheon Club.

Three months later she sat at luncheon in a fashionable London restaurant with her literary agent, who had also been Marjorie's. Writers, agents, publishers, TV producers, film stars, and large rich-looking men who financed these various affairs of the arts drifted by, greeting Miss Phipps's agent with varying degrees affability. A good-looking, ve slim young man, almo clean-shaven, gave him t merest nod and hurried on.

"I can't remember who th is," said Miss Phipps casually.

"Oh, you know him? He Marjorie's nephew, her so beneficiary and executor."

"I've seen him somewhere, think. Nice lad?"

"Thorough scoundrel. Eat up with conceit, too."

"Oh, dear! Well, po Marjorie left nothing much f him to play with."

"Only her papers, her letter her manuscripts. But a ve handsome offer has come f them from an America university. However, that lad going to accept three times t sum from one of tho newspaper millionaires," sa the agent, refraining from usi a descriptive adjective.

Miss Phipps gazed at hi perplexed.

"Marjorie," he continu carefully, "was, as you know very beautiful woman in h youth. Discreet scholar handling would be mo advisable."

"But surely she placed time limit on the printing of h personal letters?" exclaim Miss Phipps, sudden remembering her own earli days.

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"Alas, no. At the end—well, rything happened very ckly. She died that night, day before you traveled to rthshire, you remember."

"We are in for a nasty ndal, then."

There was a pause.

"Have you noticed any signs mental decay in me lately?" uired Miss Phipps.

"None."

His coolness reassured her.

"That last night Marjorie ote me a letter—the merest awl, but signed and refore, I think, not to be lected—asking me to be one her executors. I received it morning after I last saw her. eard nothing more of it, so I ached no importance to the tter."

"But, my dear Marian!" d her agent, delighted. "This splendid! This will put a ke in that young man's eel! An informal letter of t kind will have no legal dity, of course, but—"

"It might cause the nephew ne worry?"

"It will certainly cause rjorie's solicitor a scruple or two. And I'll take pains to see that it does. Where is the letter?"

"That young man stole it," said Miss Phipps, glum.

"That is a great pity. But how could he have stolen the letter, once you had received it?"

Miss Phipps described the burglary, in some detail. "Marjorie must have told him about the letter after she had written it to me, that night."

"But how could he have known where you were?"

"The porter at my flat had my address."

"And Stephen's name?"

"Anyone in the village would tell him Stephen's name and address. Oh, the burglar was that nephew all right—he's slim-shouldered enough to have got through that narrow window, and of course he'd disguised himself with beard, sideburns, and mustache. However," said Miss Phipps, suddenly brightening, "we have his fingerprints, you know."

"A very useful means of persuasion," said the agent with satisfaction.

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When our Managing Editor finished reading the manuscript of Dennis O'Neil's "Report on a Broken Bridge," she sent the story to us with the following comment: "This has a 'Citizen Kane' quality, and yet an individuality all its own." Our interest was immediately aroused.

Well, you know, our Managing Editor was right on target — she hit the bull's-eye.

If on finishing this story you are not impressed, or worse, if you do not like it, let the story simmer for a while. We think your mind will keep coming back to it again and again . . .

REPORT ON A BROKEN BRIDGE

by DENNIS O'NEIL

It wasn't love or money that drove Otis Belding to his very thorough suicide: it was something bigger, lots bigger, and knowing about it is pushing me toward a premature demise, too.

You know, boss, we might have guessed the *why* of his death if we'd bothered to think about who he was, where he came from, and especially what he'd accomplished. I'd already completed my investigation by the time I got round to looking at the movies that kid happened to be taking when Belding made his spectacular exit; but as soon as I saw them I knew my guesses were correct. I sniffed an apocalypse.

You're now reading this night letter and you'll never s the prints I've forwarded to t New York office, so I'll gi you a preview. Here's what t kid's camera caught:

Background: the Bridge R search complex. Foreground: lake, placid, dotted with ti ripples, deep-blue near t shore and powder-blue in t center. In the far distance: t Ozark Mountains. Above: mo blue, streaked with wisps white. And around, ever where: deep-green—leaves th look heavy enough to use anchors.

Enter Belding, in á sle shiny aluminum dinghy, rowi to the middle of the wate rowing despite a hefty outboa perched on the stern. (At t

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oint the kid changed to a elescopic lens.) Belding carefully cuts off the end of a long rown cigar, places the gold igar clipper and severed tip in he pocket of his shirt, puts fire o the cigar with a gold lighter. raws, exhales, slowly gazes up, own. Then he cautiously edges o the bow and sits on top of ne wooden keg: the boat lists, nd he has a few bad moments etting balanced. He does, nough, and after another long ook at the scenery he reaches own with his cigar and calmly. ouches a fuse stuck in the keg's d.

He sits quietly and I'm retty sure he's smiling. Sits elaxed as a stone, peacefully noking. There is a hard red ash and the camera shakes iolently, and searches random-, glimpsing a small army of ·ogs leaping like dervishes, and ien focuses on where Belding ad been. He isn't, not any iore. There is only a widening rcle of dirty gray in the owder-blue, and a cloudlet of luish haze crowning a roiling olumn.

It reminds me of the climax f an arty foreign flick—the nd that beats you over the ead with Profound Symbolism id in which the director uses ie H-bomb mushroom the way comic strip uses exclamation oints.

My favorite headline was on page three of the *Daily News*, amid human-interest drivel about our Indian Summer heat wave. You remember: *Boy Wonder Multimillionaire Ends With a Bang.*

Before the ink was dry on that little paradigm of class journalism you had me and my hangover in your office. The air-conditioning was on the blink—again!—and your bald pate was sweat-shiny enough to use as a shaving mirror. You looked like you'd been moldering in a rain forest for a couple of centuries, and coherency was not your strong trait, not that morning. I understood from your sputtering that Otis had done himself in, that the Board had panicked, and that unless we could demonstrate that our late president had shuffled off for reasons unconnected with the affairs of Bridge Enterprises, Inc., our stock certificates would soon be worth something less than bus transfers. I concurred, and hied away to shoot the trouble.

By noon I was aboard an Eastern jet out of Newark, grimly contemplating the early market report in the first edition of the *Post:* Bridge Enterprises was selling at 31½, down 7 in the first two hours of trading. My wallet ached: I own 300 shares myself.

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I picked up a St. Louis paper while waiting for my rent-a-car at Lambert Field: at the day's closing we were selling at 29.

I drove southwest wondering why nobody touts the beauty of that part of the country. There's nothing out here so awesome as the Grand Canyon or as numbingly spectacular as the Rockies, but nonetheless the geography is lovely—soft-edged hills and quiet valleys and lush forests. That land, west of St. Louis, is feminine America, loving and open: maybe if I'd ever found a human equivalent I wouldn't by typing this with a Beretta in my lap.

Ugliness begins about five miles north of Belding's birthplace, a town called Feeley that used to be small and isn't now because our company built a lead-refining plant closeby. Along came Bridge Enterprises and zapped 75 acres of trees and bulldozed 75 acres of grass and filled a stream with pulped garbage, bringing population and prosperity. Belding's gift to his childhood. Swell gift. The stink is so powerful it must have seeped into the soil; the sky is the color of sooty canvas; the buildings are as shocking as tarantulas on a loveseat. Up there in our air-conditioned, pastel-hued headquarters we just don't realize how gruesome the nitty-gritty is.

Feeley itself can't have changed much. Basically it's one square containing a post office, a bar with liquor store attached, an I.G.A. supermarket, a funeral parlor, and a gas station. Sundry other businesses and a scattering of houses border the square, and more are abuilding. I patronized the liquor store, obtained a fifth of my favorite, and the information that one Hap Elsenmeyer had once been Otis Belding's boyhood buddy. I went to see old buddy Hap, owner of the gas station.

Detective fiction is full of scenes in which the amiable private eye loosens the tonsils of suspicious locals with a dram of the barley. No lie, boss. Elsenmeyer is obviously a man familiar with a bottle. I had to merely hint, to sort of wave the bottle nonchalantly. Old Hap told an adolescent to mind the pumps and we retired to his office.

He produced cracked china mugs with the panache of a carny conjuror producing bunnies, and I poured. The room was pleasantly old-fashioned—even had an overhead fan that sort of sloshed the humidity around—and the pungent smell of petroleum was a relief from the lead fumes outside. We opined on the heat, agreed it sure was fierce for November

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ıd nitter-nattered our way to lking about Otis.

I won't attempt to transcribe lsenmeyer's dialect in all its ·awly splendor. You'll have to ɜ satisfied with the bones of ıe story he told me.

Otis Belding's real-life Hora- ɔ Alger saga began with a ɔok and a worm. The lad was pure genius at finding fishing ɔles. From age six on he had ınches where they'd be biting ı any given morning, and the ınches were always dead-cen- r. That was a useful talent for m, giving him a tot of social ceptance and putting food in s belly. Came fishing time his hoolmates forgave him his pa, e town ne'er-do-well, and his a, the town crazy. During the inter Otis starved and was unted; summers, he ate fresh ɜh and was grudgingly re- ected. Elsenmeyer once asked tis how he could be so ɔl-ding *certain*, and Otis said ɜ didn't know, he just had ese *feelings*.

He was, in effect, orphaned the age of ten. His father pired in a ditch one winter ght and the authorities carted s mother off to the county ental hospital, where she died me years later. An aunt did a rfectly rotten job of guard- nship. Mostly, Otis lived alone a shack near the site of the ture refinery, getting to school now and again, somehow surviving the cold months. Age eleven, he discovered games and took his first hesitant steps toward the Dow Jones Index and a cask of high-grade blasting powder.

A bunch of the good old boys used to meet in the back room of the tavern evenings for cards. Friendly poker, two-bit limit. Otis took to hanging around, probably to escape the cold of the shack. I'm guessing now, but I think he must have swiped some money from his aunt's purse one day and wangled himself a seat at the table. Played smart, according to Elsenmeyer—real smart. Uncanny smart. Walked away with enough dollars to stand beers for the bunch, root beer for himself. Kept out a stake, though, and sat in the following session, and every session thereafter, and won more than he could have made in a whole summer's field laboring. The boys were mildly amazed but, I gather, tolerant. Otis became a pet topic of Feeley conversation.

A trucker named Batson J. Frink ended Otis's poker career: Frink pushed a tractor-trailer rig for a Kansas City outfit and often joined the game when he was passing through. Nobody much liked Frink, but nobody told him, because he was big

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and mean. He was also a sore loser. He lost heavily to Otis on July 4, 1951—Elsenmeyer remembers the date exactly—and didn't enjoy it, not one bit.

He waited for Otis outside the bar while Otis was buying drinks, caught the boy, dragged him behind the building, and beat him mercilessly. Elsenmeyer was a witness; he tells it with a connoisseur's glee—how the trucker punched Otis to blood and bruises, broke a rib, kicked out teeth. Finally Frink was too tired to continue. He paused to catch his breath—and heard his death pronounced.

Sitting against the rear wall, Otis looked up through swollen eyelids and said, "You're going to die tonight." Just those five words, spoken with absolute conviction. Frink must have been shaken by them, because he went to his rig and drove off.

I checked with the Highway Patrol. The official report confirms Hap Elsenmeyer's story. Between 9:00 and 9:15 on the night of July 4, 1951 a tractor-trailer driven by Batson J. Frink was rounding a steep curve eight miles south of Feeley. The load in the trailer apparently shifted, causing the rig to topple off the road, down into a gulley, and explode. The cargo of magnesium ingots caught fire. Frink's body was never recovered.

Leaving Feeley, I had r first intimations that our l leader had been a hint spool Then I thought, no, it was or a coincidence. Sure.

The data you supplied l me next to East St. Louis. T records there showed th Belding had resided in boardinghouse near the Obe Nestor bottle factory, which not any urban gem of neighborhood, believe you n A Mrs. McNally was, and is, t landlady. Picture the dark si of the moon and see McNally- walking crater, this seni citizen, and easily 90% mali The remaining 10% praises t memory of Otis Belding.

"A *good* boy," she insiste "Best boy I ever knew."

To prove the assertion s pointed to a plaster Virgin s on a doily on a shelf in t parlor. "Bought me that wi his first big winnings, Otis did Mrs. McNally crowed. "Ain't lovely?"

You bet, Mrs. McNally, agreed. Now about thc winnings—?

Belding's co-boarder h been a man named Lev Thalier, a wine jockey and dc of odd jobs at a racetrac Cahokia Downs. Thalier, seems, had been a big noise the twenties. The usual wee history: he'd lost everything the '29 crash, cocooned hims

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le the grape, and never y emerged. Until young appeared, that is.

ı the beginning Otis de- ped his gambling talent— ied the horse forms Thalier ght home and had the wino ɜ bets for him. Thalier ɔed that the lad won istently, and he began ing duplicate bets. Thalier pered, as did his youthful tor. After a particularly tacular afternoon with the es Thalier fueled himself champagne—no more Cali- ia port for *this* ex-tycoon— reminisced, aloud and at ɔh. Dug forth from his k a sheaf of gaudy stock ficates, displayed them to and discoursed regarding narket.

'tis was interested, and . He exhausted Thalier's and the next morning got ırmful of books from the ic library. He spent days ıg over the books and the ıcial sections of local rs and, when he learned of ɜxistence, *The Wall Street nal.* Then he bought ier a new suit and arked on his second and ıltimate career.

The other boarders' eyes bugged when they see old is and Otis come out on the h looking like a bandbox," McNally croaked warmly. "They go over the bridge downtown and come back with a big envelope. They spread a bunch of papers on the kitchen floor and look at them like they was gold or something. 'We gonna be rich,' Lewis says. Young Otis, he nods his head yes."

Belding stayed at Mrs. McNally's for nine years. Thalier resurrected dormant expertise in food, drink, music, and in the midst of that slum they lived lavishly. Each Wednesday Thalier obediently guided a spanking limousine across the bridge and returned bearing a fresh envelope and the grandest largess that St. Louis could provide—records, clothes, prime steaks, bonded bourbon.

"Boarders was green with envy," Mrs. McNally solemnly assured me.

Let it be noted that Belding's appetites extended beyond his stomach, as is normal, and as the gossip columnists have frequently observed. With whom is not relevant, and anyway, you'll have a chance to leer further on in this narrative.

Belding terminated the slum idyll on his twenty-first birthday. He and Thalier drove across the Eads Bridge for the last time, saw a lawyer, signed papers, and returned to the boardinghouse. At the curb

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Belding took the wheel, said goodbye to Thalier, and went away without bothering to collect the belongings from his room. Thalier was official owner of $100,000 worth of blue-chip securities; Belding held for himself $600,000 worth of wildly speculative issues.

Thalier's income kept him happily juiced for his remaining half decade: his liver had the privilege of succumbing to only the finest French and Italian vintages.

Our accounting department will confirm that Mrs. McNally still receives a check for $400 every month—more than the old witch deserves.

I won't bore you with my pursuit of the Belding success saga. What you're getting, boss, is pure poetry; if you want prosaic details send another lackey for them. Suffice to say, for a week I relearned what we both vividly know. If you've forgotten any of it read the clippings from *Time*, *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *The Wall Street Journal*, et al.

Boy Wonder Belding could do no financial wrong: he got rich, richer, damn near richest. Two weeks before the beginning of the great computer boom he bought the software outfit. Two weeks prior to the McDonnel-Douglas merger he bought McDonnel. Two we before the Apollo contr were awarded he bought Te Instrument. And two we before the start of the season that made camp obsolete as button hooks unloaded that corny televis show. The list goes on and like a list of Howard Hugh fondest dreams.

I'm an investigator, expert snoop, so I snoop thoroughly and relentles through the pads in Mali Newport, and Acapulco; permanent suite in Las Ve the yacht; and I disproved my complete satisfaction hoary notion that the weal can't be happy. Listen, he *happy*. Young, healthy, ha some, and able to buy spare anything—a regular boun bundle of sybaritic joy was Belding. Until last Septem

In 1966 he formed Bri Enterprises and unleashed the world the hokey motto t graces our letterheads: *Build Bridges to the Future.* Belding believed those word think. He was cut from a fa idealistic cloth; he was ma that rare mass entrepreneur v actually saw himself and affairs as a force for progr Sure, he engineered dirty de but he was unique in *admitt* them, and he had an exc You remember the speech

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livered at the convention of e National Association of nufacturers—the lines quoted all the press releases: "I gret having harmed a few atively innocent parties. I rmed them in order to insure brighter tomorrow for their ildren."

Horrible speech. Honest sen- nent, though. Bear it in mind ile I take you to upstate New rk.

I won't give you my pressions of our Hudson ver plant: you've already en treated to my description the Feeley refinery, right? ll, the Hudson facility isn't ite as bad, not quite. A lot of ney was spent on landscape smetics.

The manager, Tyrone omas, gave me the grand ur. He's a proud fellow. He aks of extracting detergent osphates from raw chemicals e a frat brother boasting a quest. I understood maybe e-tenth of his rap. We ished the tour at the wide ss terrace between the plant l the river. Looking out over Hudson, with the industrial yrinth at my back, I could ost forget where I was, ept that I felt the vibration drainage pumps through my e soles and saw the churning the water where the pipes pty into it.

"You can see for yourself this is the finest facility of its kind in the world," Thomas was saying. "Per diem gross is forty tons. We hope to up that the coming fiscal period."

"Very impressive," I said. "Was Mr. Belding pleased?"

"Pleased as Punch. Gave me a bonus, promised another."

"No problems?"

"None worth talking about. We had some trouble with the radicals at the beginning, but Mr. Belding handled it all right."

"Radicals?"

Thomas smiled wearily. "Not the card-carrying sort. The dupes. At least, I think they're dupes."

I asked, "Who exactly are they?"

"The crowd from the university. They did a lot of picketing when we first went into operation. Men with the beards and the hair, girls with the signs and the beads—the whole shebang. It got on the TV news shows."

"They have something against phosphates?"

"They have something against progress," Thomas said righteously. "Darn fools. Claimed we were ruining the environment. That's a pile of you-know-what. Look around, judge for yourself. This land was going to waste before

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Bridge moved in. Nothing here but chipmunks. We pumped millions into the local economy, put five thousand men to work, going to take another two thousand if we get a go-ahead on the new wing. I ask you, is that *ruining*?"

"Did Mr. Belding do anything about the protests?"

"Oh, sure. He met with 'em on four or five separate occasions. He was a heck of a sight more patient than I'd've been in his position. He volunteered to put in the sod we're standing on and the drainage network underground. Cost a bundle, but they weren't satisfied. They said we're killing fish. Imagine. All that fuss over some fish. Heck-fire, I'd've offered to buy 'em a carload of fish to shut 'em up. Finally Mr. Belding promised to finance a research laboratory and that got rid of the pests."

And it got rid of me, too. I left Thomas to his phosphates and tucked myself into a motel for the night. You're getting nowhere, I told myself sternly, and myself agreed. My notebook and tape recorder were jammed with information, true, but I'd discovered no tidbits absent from *Who's Who*.

The only thing I had learned was that Otis Belding never—*never*—made a financial mistake. I'd always assumed he must have committed a blun or two along the way, even you and I. He hadn't. Not blunder. He'd cast his mo remains to the lake breeze w a perfect financial record although his tranquillity been infinitesimally marred the Hudson protests, t shouldn't have upset him mu considering that they clued to the sweetest tax dodge-c public relations coup a m millionaire could wish Compared to the Bridge search Center, Carnegie's braries were so many sa boxes: the intellectuals plauded, the I.R.S. condon and the Silent Majority did hear about it, as usual. In sh the Center is another monc nous success.

As I was leaving the m the next morning you pho and told me that the corpor fortunes were improving— were selling over 30 again— you said I should stay with investigation another twe four hours, prepare a docum to exhibit in the ann stockholders' booklet—sh the Bridge Family that t officers *care*—and bring expense account home. W gone through the motions that was sufficient. You said.

As it happened, I *did* nail reason for the suicide withi day, but if I hadn't I wo

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have hung with the case regardless. Suddenly you didn't seem so almighty impressive, boss; suddenly your wrath held no terrors for me. Nor the loss of my job, either. Conclusion: subconsciously, I had the answer. Or I was on the edge of an inkling—no, in this context, better call it a premonition.

I had two more prople to see. Dr. Harold Seabrook, head of the Research Center, would be in Europe until Thursday, his secretary told me long distance. So that left Miss X—Belding's mistress. I'd known about her, of course, as had you and most of the guys in the executive suite. Otis Belding's bucolic lady was the worst kept secret in the company. As acting chief of security I'd made it my business to obtain her name and address; more, I'd run a somewhat-more-detailed-routine check on her—wouldn't do to have Belding victimized by an adventuress, I rationalized. I needn't have worried. Sandra Burkholt is nobody's *femme fatale.*

Frankly I was curious. What manner of woman, I wondered, would cause a man like Belding to abandon his string of pneumatic starlets, theatrical *grandes dames*, and society sweethearts? Because abandon them he did—lopped them off like diseased limbs last summer, about the time he established the Research Center. My field personnel said *la Burkholt* was 32, single, living alone in a small isolated house not far from the Center, and the mother of an illegitimate son. Belding probably met her in November 1968, while she was employed as a typist at the Feeley refinery. It's possible he'd known her earlier, during his miserable childhood.

I arrived at her house at dusk on Wednesday. There was a sports car in the driveway: no other signs of prosperity. On the contrary. A bent rusty tricycle lay on the walk; the grass needed cutting; the house itself needed shingles and paint. Hardly a magnate's love nest.

She answered my knock and led me into the living room. The inside was a perfect reflection of the exterior: shabby furniture, cracked linoleum floor, peeling wallpaper. And Sandra completed the motif. She isn't homely: there are lingering phantoms of an artful feline girl in her bold glance, in her quick sensuous smile. But she's worn. The red hair is stringy and faded, the skin rough, the figure sagging. Had Belding liked his women pitiable? Was it really love?

Feeling strangely like an archeologist prowling an ancient temple, I followed Sandra

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to the bedroom they had shared and viewed Belding's artifacts: a medium-priced portable phonograph, a mixed collection of records, and the books and magazines he'd read himself to sleep with. Three sorts of reading matter, divided into separate piles. Books on extrasensory perception, ranging from inexpensive paperbacks to footnotey tomes to science-fiction novels. Stuff on ecology of approximately the same range, including a complete set of Sierra Club publications and a series of pamphlets from Barry Commoner's group at Washington University. And history books, mostly comprehensive texts. I paged through them, to no avail: Belding had not been an underliner.

We went into the kitchen. I unobtrusively turned on my tape recorder while Sandra concocted lemonade. That's right, boss—lemonade. As remarked, Miss Burkholt is not a *femme fatale.*

"I'll have to ask you to hold down your voice," the tape recorder echoes Sandra as I write. "My boy is sick in the next room there. Generally he's healthy as a horse. Must be one of those viruses."

Me: "I hope he feels better."

Sandra: "Thank you."

Me (hesitantly): "Did you know Mr. Belding well?"

Sandra: " 'Course. Not long but well as can be. We were lovers."

Me (embarrassed): "Forgive me for asking—but did he buy you gifts? Did he have an arrangement with you?"

Sandra (chuckling, bless her): "You mean was I a kept woman? No, sir. Oh, he bought little presents for the house and for my boy. He brought me a mixmaster once, was I think the biggest thing. He never give me money and I didn't ask for any. Didn't expect any. It was purely a man-woman thing with us. I liked him. I believe he liked me. I'll miss my Otis."

Me: "Did you notice any recent change in his behavior?"

Sandra: "He was always—well, odd. Funny, he could be touching you and somehow not be there at all, like he'd left his body behind. Oh, yes, there was one present Otis brought on his last visit I forgot about. He said something strange—"

She was interrupted by a thump from behind the wall. We rushed into the boy's cubbyhole. The child was lying in a tangle of quilt beside the bed, breathing in harsh rattling gasps. He was drenched with sweat, his skin wax-white. He wasn't suffering from virus: the kid was dying.

"We'd better get him to hospital," I said.

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Sandra wrapped him in the quilt and carried him to my car. I pegged the speedometer needle at 70 most of the distance to the local clinic. The decrepit general practitioner there diagnosed a ruptured appendix and confessed he had no facilities for treating acute peritonitis. I knew a clinic that did—coincidentally, the best medical setup in that area is at the Bridge refinery in Feeley. I got on the phone, chartered a private plane, and alerted one of those bright young specialists the company boasts of recruiting that Sandra and her son were on the way.

At the airfield I gave her my card and asked her to call the office if she or the boy needed anything. She promised she would.

Not being tired yet, I drove into the Ozark foothills, toward the Center. I surrendered to bizarre reflections—bizarre for me, anyway. Not since I'd been an altar boy waiting scared in the musty closeness of the confessional had I contemplated eternity. Maybe it was the country. If there are ghosts, they lurk in those hills, flash briefly, mockingly in headlight glare, and rattle forebodingly in eaves. Or maybe it was simple shame, an attempt to excuse my lack of professionalism. I hadn't seen Sandra earlier, during the Feeley phase of the inquiry, and that oversight had been wasteful, costly. But if I *had*, then I wouldn't have been there to bully medicos and pilots, and the boy might not have got the attention he needed. I entertained the notion that I served a benevolent destiny. Fate? Predestination? Whose will was my master? Certainly not Belding's.

Bridge Enterprises can be proud of its Research Center. Architecturally it's the best we have: instead of the usual eyesore, the building is dignified—predominantly vertical lines harmonizing with the surrounding pines. I parked in the visitor's lot and admired the flood-lit scene a bit. A guard demanded to know who I was. Then, miraculously transformed by my credentials, he hefted my bag and escorted me to the VIP quarters. Nice digs. Pastel and Danish plastic modern. Home away from . . .

A shaft of sunlight across my face woke me. I put on my most expensive lightweight suit and a white-on-white shirt-tie combo—to impress the scientific yokel with my Manhattan class.

Huh-*uh*. I doubt that Dr. Harold Seabrook *can* be impressed. He's a large chunk of dour impatience—six-six, big-bellied, features drawn as

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though his jowls were weighted. He doesn't speak: he spews.

We met in the lounge. As we talked he traced tiny precise geometrics on the formica table top in a spilling of iced tea.

"I can give you five minutes," he said brusquely.

I was annoyed. I'm a bigger corporate cheese than Seabrook. "You've got somewhere to go?" I asked.

"I've got to see about saving the human race from itself," he replied, managing not to sound corny. "I won't do it prattling with you."

"Funny," I mused sarcastically. "I read your job description. It said 'ecologist,' not 'messiah.' "

"No difference," he snapped.

Having nary a comeback to that I asked, "What exactly are you doing with the company's money? What's the project?"

He raised a brow. "At the moment? We're seeking a way to reduce the so-called 'greenhouse effect.' "

"You're messing with flowers?"

His tone put me back in knee pants and a dunce cap: I was the Second Grade's biggest dumbo, he the exasperated teacher. He said, "You've noticed the weather? Not enough heat is escaping into space. Pollutants have formed a curtain that traps short-wave radiation near the ground, and the temperature is rising to—"

I interrupted, "I don't need a pee-aitch-dee to tell me it's a hell of a hot November. I'm sure you geniuses will dope out the damnedest refrigerator in twenty years and we'll give you either a gold watch or a Nobel Prize, take your choice."

"Many of my colleagues would agree with you," he said with unexpected gentleness. "I do not, and neither did Otis Belding. He had a theory that a critical point will come in our poisoning of Earth, and when it does the planet will simply stop living—*stop*. All the life-support systems will disintegrate at once, and that will be the end. Finish. No more. We may have a few days, or a few hours, to regret our stupidity."

"That doesn't sound like it makes a lot of sense, Doc."

"I didn't think so either, at first. But I was reasoning conventionally. Then I pursued a line of research that Otis suggested and—" His voice changed: the gentleness was gone. "You've wasted enough of my time."

He pulled a folded memo sheet from his yellow-stained lab jacket. "Otis said I was to give you this."

My name was scrawled on it, in Belding's handwriting.

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"Hold it, Doc," I said. "I never *met* Otis Belding. He didn't even know I exist. You want me to believe he addressed a note to me personally before he died and left it with you? No way."

"Facts are facts," he said, getting up. "Excuse me."

He was gone, that fast, leaving another protest snagged in my throat and a zero limned in cold tea on the table. Vowing to humble him later, I opened the note. It read:

"There's nothing to be done. It is too late. See model in my office."

Signed: Otis Belding.

I obtained the key to his private office from the receptionist, climbed to the top floor, and entered. The room was barren as a Trappist cell—furnishings consisted solely of an army cot and a metal stand on top of which was a scale model of the Eads Bridge. The model was broken. Someone had hit it and broken it in half. It was a bridge that went nowhere.

There was a question yet to be answered. I used a phone in the lobby to call Sandra.

"How's your son?" I asked.

"He's doing nicely. That nice Dr. Benedict said he caught it in time. I want to thank you."

"My pleasure. Sandra, you remember what you were saying? About a present Otis bought?"

"That was the funniest he ever did. It was a gun—a pistol. I still have it, though. Lord knows what I'll ever do with a gun. He gave it to me and said, 'If you love your son you'll do him this favor.' I suppose he was joking."

"Could be. 'Bye, Sandra."

I strolled outside and ambled across the sweep of lawn, down to the lake. No hurry, not any more, for me, for you, for anyone. Because it's obvious why Otis Belding killed himself. He had a genius for prophecy, remember? I figure he had premonitions about the future—premonitions that slowly grew to convictions until, two weeks before an event, they became certainties. Once he became aware of something, he could predict its course. He became aware of ecology, he saw the "critical point" coming; he saw his future—our future—and sought refuge with a simple woman and her son, and failing to find comfort he chose to die.

Exactly thirteen days ago he chose to die.

I know how he felt. Like a man standing on a broken bridge.

I have my gun, and I've always hated being the last one out.

So—goodbye, boss.

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It was the kind of job that needed a man who was good with a gun . . .

THIRTEEN

by R. L. STEVENS

Renger looked up from the crude map on the table before him and studied the newcomer with critical eyes. "You're Hallman?"

"That's right."

"They tell me you're a good man with a gun."

"I get by."

"Then I guess you're the man we need for this job. Ever used an automatic carbine?"

"Plenty of times."

"Like this one?" Renger asked, bringing out a new Plainfield carbine very much like the standard military weapon. "It uses thirty-shot clips. All right?"

"Fine." Hallman glanced around at the five other men in the room. The only one he knew was Asmith, a part-time heroin pusher who'd been in and out of prison. He nodded to him and waited for Renger to introduce the others.

"That's Crowthy and Evans and Asmith and Galliger and Yates. A damn good team for this job. But we needed a good man with a gun—somebod who's not afraid to use it."

"That's me," Hallman saic He had earned the reputatior

"Good! We'll have smok bombs and stuff, but I'm no kidding myself that we're goin to get in there without killing few people."

"What about guards?" Hal man asked. "And patrol cars?

Renger pushed back hi graying hair and stabbed at th map with a pencil. "The onl guard you need to worry abou is right here. Take him out an it's smooth sailing. Now, patrol car comes down thi street about once every hou We're timed to miss it, but w can't be sure. All I can tell yo is that Crowthy here will b covering you from across th street. If the patrol car surprise us, you'll have to deal with it.

"I understand," Hallma said.

"Your job is to take out th guard, get into the place, an fire a few shots. Creat confusion. Make them thin

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e've got a whole army out ere. Then I'll toss a few smoke ombs and the rest of us will ıove in."

Asmith spoke up from his ɔrner. "What about the get-way?"

"We'll leave the truck at this oint and go the rest of the way ɑ foot. Afterwards each of ou will have to get back to the uck on your own. Evans will ay with the truck as a ıokout. But at ten o'clock we ıll out. Anyone not back to ıe truck by ten, we figure ıey're caught. Any ques-ons?"

As they went over the plan ep by step, Hallman found his ;tention wandering. He was 24 ɜars old, and already he had ıe reputation of being good ith a gun. Anyone who ɔthered to check his record ould know he was equally ɔod with a knife. The first an he'd ever killed had been ith a knife, and he still membered the expression of ock in the man's eyes as allman's blade •slid deep ;twеen his ribs.

That was the way it had ɜn the other times, too, ough he remembered that ;st one best of all. Sometimes had not even seen the men ;'d killed. They'd merely been ;ures to be gunned down at a stance, or sometimes men to be blown up in their beds by a well-tossed bomb. And people knew that Hallman was an expert. They came to Hallman when the killing had to be neat and swift and efficient.

"All right," Renger said. "It's set, then. We go at dawn."

The men nodded silently and left the room. There was very little conversation, and Hallman was glad of that. He was not much of a talker.

The early morning was usually best for a job of this sort, Hallman had discovered. It was especially good if you could hit a place just a few minutes before eight, when people were arriving for the day's work. The patrol cars were generally off the road then, too, changing crews for the day tour.

This morning was especially good, because a light mist from the river hung over the streets of the town. Evans had parked the truck an hour earlier, and they'd come the rest of the way on foot, moving singly to avoid attracting attention. The town was quiet, with only a few people moving about, when Hallman poked his head around a tree across the street from their target.

The first thing he saw was the uniformed guard by the gate. He seemed to know

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everyone who entered, though occasionally he glanced at a pass when it was held out to him. The holstered revolver at his side presented no difficulty to Hallman, who could have, if necessary, killed the man from across the street.

Hallman broke from cover and walked directly toward the guard, carrying the carbine casually in his left hand, pointed at the ground. The man didn't notice him until he was almost up to him, and then the guard's hand dropped uncertainly to the holstered revolver. "You need a pass here," he said. "A pass."

Hallman smiled and kept walking toward the man, as if he didn't understand the language. When he was close enough he brought his right arm up quickly to the guard's throat, plunging his knife deep into the flesh. The man went down with the gurgling sound they always made. Already, before the guard hit the ground, Hallman swung his automatic carbine up to cover the doorway ahead of him, and that was almost a fatal mistake.

From behind him he heard Crowthy shout a warning, and he whirled to see the patrol car traveling fast down the street. They'd already spotted him and screeched to a stop. Crowthy fired a quick wild shot and retreated toward the woods. Two officers jumped out of the car and one of them fired three rapid shots at Crowthy's retreating back. Hallman saw him topple in the dirt as Hallman brought his own weapon up. He fired a quick burst, dropping one officer in his tracks as the other dived behind the patrol car. A third man, the driver, started out his side and then fell back, bleeding from the shattered windshield.

Hallman moved backward into the building, firing as he went, and saw the second officer fall over. Then he was inside, running down a dingy hallway, ramming another 30-shot clip into the weapon. He hoped the others would be coming soon.

A man appeared ahead of him at the end of the passage, like a pop-up target in a shooting gallery, and Hallman sprayed him with bullets. Then he ran on, into the first room, firing quick shots to clear the way. He'd got the rhythm of it now, the half-forgotten feel for killing that left him at times but always returned.

In the second office a screaming woman was hunched in one corner, covering her face. Hallman paused only an instant, and then fired a short burst into her body. She slid down the wall, torn and bleeding and

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already without life. She was the first woman he'd ever killed, and he was surprised at how little it bothered him.

He smashed out the window in a front room, seeking the others, and saw two more uniformed guards running around the front of the building. He fired fast, cutting them both down with a line of bullets across their backs. Then he saw the others break from the cover of the trees. Renger was in the lead, running with his gun ready, and he hurled a smoke bomb as he crossed the road. Then someone on the floor above cut loose with three quick shots and Hallman saw Yates stagger and go down in the street, just before the smoke obscured him.

Hallman found the stairs and started up. A figure appeared at the top and let go with the rest of the clip. Before he could reload, a second man fell on him with a roar, toppling him backward halfway down the steps. He felt the carbine slide away from him, but he rolled over and managed to get his knife out. He plunged it into the fleshy man's side, heard his grunt of pain, and plunged it again. The man went suddenly limp, and Hallman rolled his body down the stairs.

There was shooting below him now, and he knew Renger and the others were past the gate. He made it the rest of the way to the top of the stairs, finding his weapon and then reloading it as he climbed. He burst through the door at the top landing and killed the man at the window with a sudden spray of bullets. Two others—short frightened men—raised their hands and backed against the wall. Hallman shot them both.

He could feel the warmth of blood on his lower lip now, and he realized the man on the stairs had landed some damaging punches. But there was no pain. The exhilaration of the moment had blotted it out. He glanced out the window, but the smoke was too thick to see anything.

Leaning against the wall he tried to remember how many he'd killed. The guard, and at least two of the three in the patrol car, and the man in the passage. And the woman. The two guards out the window. And the two on the stairs. And three in this room. That made twelve, in just under five minutes. Fast work. Good work.

He took out his knife again and made sure they were dead. He was on his last clip of bullets, so he couldn't waste any more. Then he heard someone coming up the stairs,

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calling his name. It was Renger, carrying two suitcases. Hallman licked the blood from his lip, savoring it, and went to meet him.

"You did a damn good job," Renger told him. "You're a regular one-man army!"

"I said I was good with a gun. How many men did we lose?"

"Crowthy and Yates. The others are all right. Let's plant these explosives and get the hell out of here!"

They did their job, working fast, and then left the building with the others.

"Damn!" Renger said as they started across the muddy road toward the shelter of the woods. "I'm going to see that you get a medal for this, Hallman!"

"Thank you, Major."

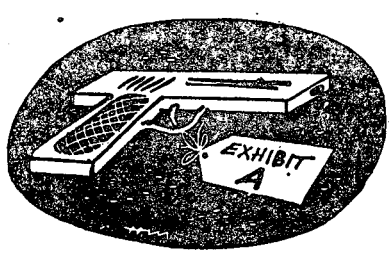
"When they hear back home how you led an attack on the enemy's forward command post and helped destroy it, almost singlehanded, they'll make you a hero. How many did you kill?"

"Twelve."

"Damn good shooting!"

They passed the enemy patrol car, parked at a crazy angle on the road, and Hallman saw that the driver was still alive, gasping for breath behind the shattered windshield. He raised his carbine with one hand and killed the man with a single shot.

"That makes thirteen," he said, and walked on.



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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

With the view from my window anything but wintry, in the at of a Southern September it's not easy to round up commended titles for the summary in our near-Christmas issue. it I will try.

The year, predictably, has been much as usual: mingled gripes d hosannahs, with the praiseworthy in general outweighing the d. In passing we have touched on many grave subjects, from the igin of "son of a bitch" to the history of the Black Maria Club, at projected, ill-fated society for studying real-life crimes which ver quite quickened into breath. But these matters have been ly in passing, as background for the parade of fiction whose mor is now fading away.

Since I mentioned the Black Maria Club, I might add that '71 s been rich in books featuring criminals from real life. Most rnestly you are recommended to Jack McPhaul's *Johnny Torrio, rst of the Gang Lords*, Paul Sann's *Kill the Dutchman!* and John obler's *Capone*.

Each is the biography of some once-important underworld Mr. g, from the modest eminence of Arthur Flegenheimer ("Dutch" hultz) to the dizzy pinnacle of Big Alphonse Capone, matched Grand Goblin of them all. These two met an pleasant end: Schultz before gang bullets and Capone of eeping disease. Only Torrio, to point no moral or adorn no tale, ed in the odor of sanctity after a peaceful old age.

And, while we deal with factual crimes, read *Victorian Studies Scarlet*, by Richard D. Altick. No gangsters, it's true, but cturesque, bloodthirsty wrong 'uns from the reign of the Good ueen cut capers as well as throats through a vivid *grand guignol* much power and charm. Yet you are most interested, perhaps, fiction; let's turn to fiction now.

Classic detection? An abundance of it. Only once was I so sperate, with neither first-class new book nor first-class old one

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available in paperback, that I felt compelled to cite a classic st published at full price. Chesterton's *The Father Brown Omnibu* For the rest, choice titles new and old were all over the place.

The editor-in-chief, ever-reliable Ellery Queen, weighed in wi *A Fine and Private Place*, domestically murderous from the fir marriage proposal to the shock of the last confrontation. (By tl way, he also edited three anthologies.) Emma Lathen, also reliabl provided a brace of adventures, *Pick Up Sticks* and *Ashes Ashes*, for John Putnam Thatcher of the Sloan Guaranty Trus From established writers, hardcover and paperback too, depend c Dick Francis's *Rat Race*, Sara Woods's *Let's Choose Executor* Hugh Pentecost's *The Deadly Joke*, Hillary Waugh's *'3 Manhattan East*, Edmund Crispin's *Frequent Hearses*, Phil Macdonald's *Murder Gone Mad*. Among newcomers c comparative newcomers, salute Harry Carmichael *(Remo Control)*, Ruth Rendell *(A Guilty Thing Surprised)*, Catherir Aird *(A Late Phoenix)*, John and Emory Bonett *(The Sound c Murder)*.

Espionage? Beginning as far back as John Buchan's classic c World War I, *The 39 Steps*, we soon roar up to date with *Th Poisoners* by Donald Hamilton, *Assignment—Tokyo* by Edward Aarons, *The Twisted Wire* by Richard Falkirk, *Place of Mists* b Robert McLeod. Ranging over all the earth for its betrayals, here cloak-and-dagger slipperiness of the true stab or vintage; don't mi any title.

This year I have even ventured to review criticism, wit deserved praise for *The Mystery Writer's Art* by Francis M. Nevin and *A Catalogue of Crime* by Jacques Barzun and Wendell Hert Taylor. But such remarks stray from the point, to which we mu return.

Rounding out our three categories of sensationalism wit mystery-adventure, then, let me give you four mystery-adventure as strong as the detective stories or the espionage. From Victo Canning's *The Great Affair* and Jack Higgins's *Night Adventure c Sinos* to Robert L. Fish's *The Green Hell Treasure* and Wh Masterson's *The Gravy Train* they are loaded with high explosiv The two last-named, presenting *every* clue, might well be calle detection; and, though a critic dare pronounce nothing best, enjoyed *The Gravy Train* more than any novel I have read th year.

Is it a good omen for the future? *Deo volente*, let's hope so!

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a NEW Ponsonby story by

ALAN K. YOUNG

Professor Ponsonby, unraveler of secret messages, is challenged by a classic cipher out of the past. Admittedly, the cipher is a complex one, but we hasten to tell you it is not at all necessary for you to decipher the block of symbols. (Of course, if you want to, go ahead — and good luck!) But if you don't even try, your enjoyment of the story will in no way be diluted or diminished . . . Ponsonby, Professor of English emeritus at Briarwood College, becomes a more appealing character with each new story. He himself describes this adventure perfectly: "Fascinating. Most intriguing."

PONSONBY AND THE CLASSIC CIPHER

by ALAN K. YOUNG

Professor Ponsonby smiled at his old friend across the study hearth. "Well, Rene," he asked, "is it time?"

Rene LeBreau withdrew, startled, from whatever distant ntasy he had been pursuing in the depths of his brandy glass. He as a small man, with small nervous hands and a lined red face iat was dwarfed by his unruly halo of white hair. At 68 he was n years younger than his host, Briarwood College's Professor of nglish emeritus, but he could have passed for the same age.

"Time, Amos?" he asked. "Time for what?"

"Time to tell me what has kept you so distracted this evening. 'hen I broached the subject earlier, you suggested it wait till after inner. How was it Browning's Bishop Brougham put it? 'I romised, if you'd watch a dinner out, we'd see truth dawn ogether—truth that peeps over the glasses' edge when dinner's one.' " Ponsonby raised his own snifter. "More brandy?"

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"No, thank you." LeBreau's accent was primarily Oxoni with only the barest hint of his native French. "And I had forgotten, Amos. But I've been sitting here asking myself if it i time—if it would ever be time, in fact. What started i woolgathering was your telling me before dinner how yo helped your local police solve one or two little puzzles recent That set me to thinking about an unsolved puzzle of my o which I've carried about with me now for twenty-six yea Actually, it's a letter—in cipher—from a friend. I don't believe I even had it out of my wallet in a decade, yet scarcely a day g by that I don't give it at least a passing thought."

"And in twenty-six years you've never succeeded in decipheri it?" Ponsonby chuckled. "I'm sure I'd have given up long ago a simply asked my friend what he meant by it."

"I last met this man on the street in Gramonte just two da before he sent it. That was June 2, 1944. I never saw him again

"Ah," said Ponsonby. "Lost in the war?"

"Yes—lost in the war."

"And in all these years you've never asked an expert decipher it for you? Do you suspect it of being too personal?"

"No—at least, I don't think so. And I doubt if it's really th difficult, if I could just put my mind to it long enough. But t night I first received it I had only a few hours to work on it befc the Gestapo came for me. Then after the war, when I got ho from the concentration camp and got it out from where I'd hidd it, I found I simply couldn't concentrate on it long enough. I tri telling myself it was just because it wasn't important any mo but in my heart I knew—" The little Frenchman lifted haunt eyes. "Quite frankly, Amos, I've always been afraid to disco what it says!"

Ponsonby regarded his friend sympathetically. "Would it he to tell me the whole story?"

LeBreau stared into the fire for several moments. At last said, "Perhaps it *is* time, after all. Do you remember, Amos, t weekend you visited me in Normandy before the war? You spent the summer at Oxford and came over to France in ea September."

"The autumn of '36—how could I forget? Your Chate Montclair was the most beautiful estate I'd ever seen, and yo Denise the most beautiful hostess."

"Ah, yes, my two great loves. And how I enjoyed showi

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iem off! I still do the Chateau, of course, although it's not the ime since Denise died. But do you recall having met a friend of iine named Victor Mornier that weekend?"

"A short, rather dark chap with an infectious laugh?"

"Yes, that was Victor. My oldest and dearest friend, even iough, God help me, I was forced to cut him dead the last dozen mes we met."

"Tell me," said Ponsonby softly.

The Frenchman hefted his brandy glass as though hoping to nd in its weight some suggestion of where best to begin his story. Have you ever had the kind of friendship, Amos," he asked at ist, "that is at once both a close friendship and a keen rivalry? ecause that's the way it was with Victor Mornier and me, almost :om the cradle. We played together as children, went camping ogether on holidays, attended the local academy together, where 'e vied for the same scholastic prizes, played on the same teams, ven courted the same girls. But the honors were remarkably even, o our rivalry served as a spur to our friendship rather than a andicap.

"Then in 1921 we both went off to university in ngland—Victor to Cambridge and I to Oxford. Unfortunately, 'ictor had to drop out after a year; his father had died, and far :om being the wealthy man we had all supposed, the settlement f his estate showed him to have been quite deeply in debt. But I 'as able to help out, and Victor managed to save part of his ather's land, and by the time I was graduated and had returned to ormandy he had a flourishing business going.

"It wasn't long before our rivalry was going again, as keen as ver." LeBreau smiled, remembering. "There was scarcely any skill 1 which we didn't feel compelled to compete—tennis, golf, bridge, hess. But most of all we liked to challenge each other with—what nall I call them?—puzzles, riddles, conundrums of all kinds. vening after evening we would sit over our cognac just as you and are doing tonight, testing each other with little-known facts, or laying 'Who Said That?' with obscure quotations from French or nglish or American literature. Victor's knowledge of your nguage and literature was equal to mine—his library of English ooks was just as extensive.

"There was only one area where I really outshone him in those ays, and I'm afraid it does me no credit. I was far more of a ilettante; I played harder, I dabbled more, I squandered my time

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and money, while Victor had to work hard to pay off his fathe debts. In fact, he was just beginning to get his head above water that dreadful autumn of '39 when the world changed so abrupt for all of us."

Again LeBreau fell silent, staring into the fire. Finally resumed his story. "But as terrible as the war was, Amos, the mc terrible thing for us in France was the suddenness with which ended—officially ended, at any rate. That was the blackest day our lives, and only one thing sustained us: we knew, as surely we knew the sun would rise the next day, that our country wou one day be free again. And we knew that until that day, if we we to salvage anything of our national honor, those of us in occupi France would have to keep right on fighting the Nazis in eve way we could.

"Half a dozen of us gathered at Montclair one evening in Ju 1940 to organize the Resistance in our arrondissement. The pl we finally settled on was to organize *two* underground networ one of which would concern itself exclusively wi espionage—gathering information about German troop movemen and defenses to be passed on to the Free French and t British—while the other would be responsible for sabotage—dera ing trains, blowing up bridges, smuggling out escaped prisone And because the two networks would be independent of ea other except at the very top, only a few key people would kn the make-up of both groups. Thus the betrayal or infiltration one would not necessarily jeopardize the members of the other. so we thought then."

LeBreau paused to take a sip of his brandy. "Victor and I we chosen to head the two networks. Victor was mayor of Gramon at the time, and we knew that the Nazis preferred to work wi local officials provided they showed signs of cooperatin accordingly, Victor was chosen to organize a group which wou appear to collaborate with the Germans and would thus relatively free to come and go, to mingle socially, to watch a listen and find a hundred opportunities to ferret out t information the Allies would need. And it fell to me to organi the other network—the dynamiters, the saboteurs, even t assassins." LeBreau shuddered, remembering.

Without asking, Ponsonby picked up the decanter and refill his friend's glass. The firelight glinted warmly on the dark liquid the Frenchman continued his tale.

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"Because my network was to be responsible for all the hostile activities, it was decided that I should maintain contact with London by setting up a short-wave radio station in the wine cellar at Montclair. But this presented a problem: if Victor's group was to gather the information the Allies would need and I was to provide the link with the free world, we would need some means of frequent contact between us.

"It was Denise who had—what is it your American advertising people call it?—the brainstorm. She would provide the liaison by the simple expedient of having an 'affair' with Victor. The stolid unimaginative Germans would never suspect the proud seigneur of Chateau Montclair of knowingly countenancing midnight trysts between his wife and the notorious puppet mayor of Gramonte, so if Denise were to seize every opportunity to sneak off for an hour or so with Victor, the Nazis would be amused rather than suspicious.

"So, as far as the enemy was concerned, I became a cuckold, Denise an adulteress, and Victor a collaborator. And it worked, Amos; we had one of the most successful underground operations in occupied France, until"—LeBreau stared at his host as though he still did not quite believe the import of his next words—"we were all betrayed."

Ponsonby could not bear to look into his friend's memory-haunted eyes; he swirled his brandy snifter, creating a miniature whirlpool in its depths. "Do you know by whom?" he asked.

"No. We never found out. At the time of the Gestapo raids there were just nine of us who knew enough to accomplish so sweeping a betrayal. Of the nine, three died that night, either slain trying to escape capture or executed on the spot by the Gestapo, and the rest of us were arrested and sent to concentration camps in Germany. Of those six, two are known to have died in the camps while two others vanished, swallowed up in the confusion of Germany's defeat. I alone survived to return to France after the war. I've always assumed that the traitor must have been one of the two who disappeared in Germany, but I've never been certain."

Ponsonby frowned. "You said, Rene, that three died the night of the betrayal, two died in concentration camps, two disappeared, and only you survived the war. But that adds up to only eight. What of the ninth?"

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"Eh?" LeBreau appeared to drag his mind back from som lonely distance. "Oh. I should have said that of those who survive the night of the raid, all but one of us were arrested. The Nazi never bothered Denise. I've often thought that the traitor whoever he was, must have been in love with her—God know there were enough of us who were—and so kept silent about he role in the Resistance."

Ponsonby carefully set down his brandy glass. "Tell me abou the night of the betrayal."

"It was June 4, 1944, just two days before D-day. We didn' know that then, of course, but we did know that an Allied landin was imminent. It was just after midnight when one of m lieutenants arrived at the chateau with word of the betrayal. M people were being arrested all over the arrondissement; it wa obvious that my entire network had been smashed and that it wa only a matter of time before the Gestapo would come for me.

"But I still didn't know that the betrayal had included Victor' group as well, so I sent Denise off to warn him. It wasn't the firs time she'd slipped away to see him after I was supposedly asleep so I knew the Gestapo wouldn't be suspicious of her absence, an I wanted to get her away from Montclair before they arrived— was hoping her cover might still be intact. She didn't want to leav me, of course, but I was able to make her see it was the wises course.

"It wasn't until eleven months later, when I returned from th concentration camp, that I learned what had happened to her tha night: how she'd arrived in sight of Victor's house just as a carloa of Gestapo agents had pulled up in front and gone storming inside how she'd hidden in a nearby barn until after dawn and the returned to Montclair to find the chateau deserted; how she' lived for months in an agony of doubt, expecting the Gestapo t come for her at any moment.

"And of course all that time she didn't know what had becom of me, either; she assumed I'd been arrested and taken t Germany, but she couldn't be certain. And of course she knew nothing about Victor's letter."

"Tell me about the letter," said Ponsonby.

"Victor's messenger arrived at Montclair with it about half an hour after Denise had left to warn him. And those next two hours Amos, were the longest and most agonizing of my life. I knew—I *knew!*—that I should go at once to the short-wave radio in the

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cellar and send the message on to London where it could be deciphered by experts. But instead I sat there—tired, terrified, sick with worry over what might be happening to Denise, what would soon be happening to me, cursing Victor for having chosen such a time to challenge me with one last puzzle, yet unable to let go of it.

"I was in the grip of that damned rivalry, don't you see? Because I knew that Victor, pressed for time and under the most harrowing circumstances, had still managed to devise that cipher, and I simply refused to admit that I couldn't solve it under equally trying conditions. I knew I was behaving like a fool—but I couldn't stop. God help me, Amos, I was like a man possessed! It didn't even occur to me to send it on to London and *then* try my hand at deciphering it. I had to try it then and there.

"Then suddenly the Gestapo were pounding on my door. I managed to hide the letter where it would be safe till after the war, but by then, of course, it was too late. Denise saw that. She saw what it was doing to me and begged me to destroy it. I realize now, of course, that she was terrified that I would discover—"

A log shifted in the fireplace with a sputter. LeBreau's unfinished sentence slid into the momentary diversion like a snake disappearing into tall grass.

"Tell me about the letter," Ponsonby repeated hastily. "What sort of cipher did Victor use?"

"Two ciphers—rather, one cipher and one code. There's a solid block of symbols and the letter itself, although only Denise and I would have realized that the letter was some kind of code. At least the second and third paragraphs are, because otherwise they don't make sense."

"May I see the letter?" asked Ponsonby.

LeBreau hesitated only a moment. Then, removing his wallet from his inside breast pocket, he extracted a small square of paper which he unfolded and handed to Ponsonby.

The latter's eyebrows registered his surprise. "But it's in English! Wasn't that unusual?"

"No. Victor and I agreed when we organized our underground networks that if written communication between us became absolutely unavoidable we'd use English. That was less to deceive the Germans than to keep some young courier—and we were using virtual children in those days, God help us!—from being tempted to read something he'd be better off not knowing."

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Ponsonby turned to the letter. It was written in longhand on a single sheet of paper, badly soiled with age and handling. "Dear Rene," it began; "The cover of both our networks has been broken and our entire organization betrayed. The Gestapo will doubtless be coming for all of us before morning. As soon as I've finished this note I plan to go into hiding until the Allies arrive. Perhaps I've been a fool to have spent a whole hour devising this message, but I'm certain you will understand why I felt impelled to do so. You will not consider it good news, but it's something I wanted you to know."

Ponsonby paused, glancing at the Frenchman over the top of the letter. "And you say that these second and third paragraphs must be a code of some sort?"

LeBreau nodded and Ponsonby resumed his reading.

"And so for now, Rene, goodbye. When this war is over and these troubled days are behind us, what do you say we round up the old gang and go on a glorious holiday to that little inn near Cremona that we enjoyed so much? How was it called? *L'Insetto d'Oro*, wasn't it? You may remember that Jean, Kirk, Quentin, and several others weren't with us there before, but this time perhaps they'll all come. At least we can send each one a letter and let him answer for himself! Then we can all sit on the terrace of an evening, sipping our wine and watching the barges drift lazily down the river into the sunset. Remember?

"Yes, Rene, let's do it! We'll leave the world behind and anyone who would give us away can be dealt with as the need arises by you or I (although my role will have to be a small one, as I will also be busy with other matters). There is a certain fat couple whom I think we should leave at home this time—I am sure you know the ones I mean and so will not dirty my page with their names. I have stuck behind them through thick and thin, yet I know they would betray us if they could. In their place I suggest we invite one who is known to us all, a familiar substitute, a good Christian gentleman whose son will also be of the party. Again I will not say his name lest this fall into the wrong hands, but I am confident that you will take my meaning.

"But listen to me!—running on like an old fishwife when the Gestapo may be arriving at any moment! Does it all sound a crazy dream, Rene? Perhaps it is, but a dream worth dreaming, isn't it? Think about it, please!"

It was signed, simply, "Victor," with the signature followed

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mmediately by a solid block of letters, numbers and symbols:

:2X¶3(*u20ıxz96izıX (4 (†(‡‡:¶09*2†z23040ıXz*u6 (xzXix0] (4*u6i‡2zk6¶xzı3 (0930z44ı6u*i0?X¶3 (*u (9i¶] (9xz4u20ı4) 0 †] i‡ı]¶Xu;i43zko20ı69z*¶†·(‡‡:uXi (6? (9z‡kz2*¶93Xu9z3‡z4 6i9¶ (4) z‡‡6 (8z‡20ı (9†uz‡Xz4 (9z‡‡i‡4¶20ı636 (ı*k) z93?6 u9] 8 (x 306

After several minutes of careful study Ponsonby lowered the etter to his lap. "Fascinating. Most intriguing," he said.

LeBreau had been watching him intently. "The block looks amiliar to you, of course?"

"It does. To anyone with an interest in the detective story and knowledge of its landmarks, the similarity is inescapable. Even if Victor hadn't put such an obvious clue in his letter."

"Ah, so you spotted that, too? That's what I meant by the hing's not making sense; a group of us *had* gone to Italy on holiday before the war, but we'd stayed in a little village on the ligurian coast near Genoa, and at the Hotel Emmanuel. In any vent, we were nowhere near Cremona."

"I assume that the source to which Victor was referring would ave been available among the English books in his library?"

"Undoubtedly. In a French translation, too, most likely; we rench regard it as a classic of your American literature."

Ponsonby was again studying the letter. "And the other tatements in these second and third paragraphs are also eaningless to you?"

LeBreau nodded. "Those names Victor mentions, for instance. Ve did have many mutual friends, but Jean and Kirk and Quentin couldn't place at all. And then there's all that mumbo jumbo bout whom we would or would not invite. Victor pretends to ass it off as a bit of gossip, but neither Denise nor I had the aguest idea whom he was talking about."

"So that those two paragraphs are almost certainly the key to he cipher which follows." Ponsonby gazed thoughtfully at his old riend, then nodded brusquely, as though confirming a sudden ecision. "Tell me, Rene," he said, "why *have* you been so eluctant to decipher Victor's message?"

The Frenchman gestured impatiently. "But I thought that would be obvious, Amos. Remember, Victor sent that letter just wo days before D-day, which we all knew to be imminent. So

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what more likely than that somehow he'd discovered vita information about the German defenses that might have save thousands of Allied lives if he could have gotten word of it t London? What else would have made him take so much time ove that message when he should have been running for his life?"

"But that still wouldn't explain the necessity for a ciphe Rene. If the Germans had intercepted a letter containin information about their own defenses, it would scarcely have bee news to them."

"Ah, but it might have been a tremendous surprise to them t learn that the Resistance had that information, too! And if it wa vital information, Victor wouldn't have stopped at just on attempt to get word out; he'd have kept on trying to get hi message to London from wherever he was, so that even if th Germans *had* intercepted his letter to me, it would still have bee essential that they not be able to read it, at least not until after th invasion."

The little Frenchman leaned forward earnestly. "Don't you see Amos, that *has* to be the explanation of those rambling nostalgi paragraphs? Victor must have been hoping that if the German intercepted his letter they'd take the paragraphs at face value, an so concentrate their efforts on the cipher block. Because he knew that if his letter reached me, I would immediately recognize thos paragraphs as being the key to his cipher and pass that informatio on to London. So whatever his message was, Victor didn't care i the Germans found it out eventually, just so long as they didn' find it out at once. Which makes it all the more likely that it ha something to do with the Allied invasion."

"I suppose that does make sense," admitted Ponsonby.

"You *know* it does, Amos. And *I* know that's what Denis thought, too. She was afraid if I deciphered Victor's message I' realize that my vanity and stupidity had very likely caused th deaths of hundreds of Allied soldiers. That I was not only a foo but a murderer as well!" LeBreau buried his face in his hands 'And how in the name of God could I live with knowledge lik that?"

Ponsonby stared in sympathy at his friend's bowed head. "I'r sorry, Rene. I never should have pried—"

"No!" LeBreau sat up briskly. "I've been a coward lon enough! I should have asked someone less involved than I am t decipher Victor's message for me years ago. I'm afraid I can

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y my departure for the Coast tomorrow, but I'll leave the
r with you and stop by again on my return next week. At
h time, Amos"—terror and hope fought in the Frenchman's
e—"I will expect you to give me Victor's message!"

he grandfather clock in the corner of the study was striking
n the following day when Ponsonby laid down his pen and
ed back in his chair. Victor Mornier's deciphered message lay
he desk before him.
le had set to work on it immediately following LeBreau's
rture that morning. His first step had been to select, from the
ion of his library devoted to Nineteenth Century American
ature, a handsome, calf-bound volume which he knew to
ain the two passages he must consult in order to solve the
tery. The first of these was a solid block of symbols strikingly
liar to the one in Victor's letter:

‡‡†305)) 6*;4826) 4‡.) 4‡) ;806*;48†8¶60)) 85;] 8*:‡*8†
88) 5*†;46 (;88*96*?;8) *‡(;485) ;5*†2:*‡ (;4956*2 (5* —
8¶8*;4069285) ;) 6†8) 4‡‡;1 (‡9;48081;8:8†1;48†85;4) 485†
306*81 (‡9;48; (88;4 (‡?34;48) 4‡; 161;:188;‡?;

he second, a few pages on, was the deciphered version:

A good glass in the Bishop's hostel in the Devil's
—twenty-one degrees and thirteen minutes—northeast and by
h—main branch seventh limb east side—shoot from the left eye
he death's-head—a bee-line from the tree through the shot fifty
out."

or ten minutes Ponsonby had diligently matched alphabet
r to symbol. Then he had sat in silence for almost an hour,
ming over Victor's letter. The first six sentences in the second
graph had given him no trouble, nor had the entire third
graph—it had been easy enough to see what Victor was getting
here, especially with the help he had received from William
and. But the long sentence near the close of the second
graph—Victor's nostalgic reminiscence about sitting on the
ice of an imaginary Italian inn at sunset—had stumped him.
tumped him until he had muttered, "Confound it, the thing's
ossible!"—and slapped his desk with such vehemence that he
started the globe on one corner to gently spinning. In that

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instant he had known the solution to Victor Mornier's fi challenge. "Because it *is* impossible," he had murmured, reach out to stop the spinning earth.

Now another hour had passed and Victor's message unmasked before him. Ponsonby sighed as he thought of the aw moment when he must show it to LeBreau. How right, he thoug how prophetically right, Thomas Gray had been: "Wh ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

"Tell me, Amos, how did you go about deciphering Victc message?" It was a week later, and Rene LeBreau once again fac Ponsonby across the study hearth. The Frenchman sat stif erect, obviously braced for the worst.

Ponsonby seized the reprieve which LeBreau's question h offered. "I began," he said, "by accepting your interpretation Victor's basic plan—that he intended to devise a secret mess and then give you an advantage over the Germans by hid certain clues to its solution in a chatty, seemingly innocent lett But even if that were so, I reasoned, his first concern must h been the cipher itself.

"It's no mean trick to devise any kind of code or cipher on t spur of the moment, and this one presented definite problems he made it too simple and the Germans did intercept his lett they'd very likely break it in a matter of hours even without t help of his clues. Too hard, and composing a letter of clues wo become impossibly difficult in the short time he could spare.

"I pictured him sitting at his desk racking his brain fo solution to his problem when suddenly it occurred to him t there was a *ready-made* cipher available in his library, whi thanks to your extensive collection of American literature, v almost certainly available in your library as well. He was thinki of course, of Captain Kidd's cipher in Edgar Allan Poe's story, *T Gold-Bug.*

"Thus Victor adopted that famous cipher as the basis for own, and in case you failed to recognize it he gave you a hint the first of his covering-letter clues by 'recalling' an imaginary v to Cremona—a city on Italy's *Po* River—and an equally imagin sojourn at an inn called *L'Insetto d'Oro,* which, of course, is t Italian for—"

"*The Gold-Bug,*" interrupted LeBreau. "That much I h worked out for myself."

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"You may have deduced some of the rest," said Ponsonby. Now, Poe's story does not list Captain Kidd's cryptographic phabet in full, but it would have taken Victor only a few inutes to work it out. He would then have discovered, however, at since Kidd's deciphered message makes no use of the letters *j*, *q*, *x*, and *z*, there are no symbols for those letters in *The old-Bug* cipher.

"That, of course, was no great stumbling block, but Victor obably decided that Poe's cipher would be easier to modify, as felt it advisable to do, if he had a complete alphabet to work ith. Accordingly, he hit on the simple expedient of having each the missing letters represent itself. That's what he means in his xt clue: the phrase 'Jean, Kirk, Quentin, and several others' fers to the missing letters—*j*, *k*, *q*, *x*, and *z*—and the operative ords in the next sentence are 'each one a letter' and 'answer for mself.' "

Ponsonby frowned thoughtfully as he continued his planation. "I was assuming that the idea of using the Captain dd cipher had appealed to Victor because Poe's works are not as ell known in Germany as they are in France, so that even a erman intelligence officer would be less likely to recognize the urce than you would. But it must then have occurred to him at that was by no means a certainty, and that it would be wise r him to make some basic change in Poe's alphabet so as to foil e rapid solution which must otherwise follow recognition of his urce.

"I was convinced that his next sentence contained a clue to ch a change, but I was at a loss to grasp it until I finally had nse enough to refer to my globe and realized—something I ould have recalled at once—that the Po River flows into the driatic Sea. That is to say, it flows toward the *east*, so that it ould have been impossible to have watched barges '*drift* . . . into e sunset.' In short, Victor reversed the direction of the river to dicate to you that he had reversed the alphabet in *The old-Bug.*"

"So that the symbols for *a*, *b*, *c*, and so on in Poe's cipher—?" gan Lebreau.

"Became the symbols for *z*, *y*, *x*, and so on in Victor's. ecisely. But even with that change, as Victor himself must have en realized, he still had a cipher that was no great challenge. onsequently, I pictured him next as thrashing about in his mind

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for some way to make it just a bit more difficult. And since he ha recalled Poe's story for his basic cipher, it seemed logical that h should also recall William Legrand's method of deciphermen You'll remember that Legrand used the prevalence of the letter and the frequency with which it is doubled in English.

"Accordingly, I assumed that the phrase, 'anyone who wou give us away,' near the beginning of Victor's third paragrap referred to the letter *e*, and that the balance of that clause—'can b dealt with . . . by you or I'—indicated something he planned to d to it. Now no man with a command of English such as yc attributed to Victor Mornier was likely to use 'I' as the object of preposition. Accordingly, I suspected the error to have bee deliberate, and my suspicion immediately pointed to the meanir of his clue: orally, you see, *you* and *I* are letters as well as word and Victor was here indicating his intention of using those lette as additional symbols for *e*, thus giving him three possible *e*'s ar frustrating any attempt to break his code on the basis of simp letter frequency.

"In the parenthetical phrase which follows"—Ponsonby stresse the key words as he read aloud from Victor's letter—" 'althoug my role will have to be *a small one*, as *I* will also be *busy wi other matters*,' he acknowledges the fact that capital *I* is use elsewhere in Poe's cipher, so that it will have to be a small lower-case *i* which serves as one of his stand-ins for *e*."

Ponsonby paused to marshal his thoughts. "Now I should poi out that throughout these deductions I had been ignoring the ste which Poe correctly observes to be primary in solving any ciphe that of determining the language of the original message. Because wasn't working with the cipher itself, you see, but merely wi Victor's clues, and I was confident that once I had worked out h alphabet, words in one language or another would begin to emer from his cipher. Even Victor's concern with the letter *e* was r indication, since that letter is even more prevalent in French tha it is in English.

"His next clue, however, made it clear that his decipher message must be in English, for, again following Legrand's lead, I next turned his attention to the combination *th*, which occu with great frequency in English but relatively seldom in Frenc Victor identifies it as 'a certain fat couple . . . I have stuck behir them through *thick* and *thin*'—as of course *i* does."

Ponsonby stopped abruptly, startled by the awkward sound

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e phrase. Then he smiled wryly at his own ingrained purism and sumed his explanation. "To replace *th*, Victor tells us, he is ing to use 'a familiar substitute,' and of course the most familiar bstitute for the unknown in the realm of symbols is the capital An illiterate man will substitute it for his signature, or an vertiser will substitute the term 'Brand X' when he wishes to fer to a rival product. And Victor then goes on to describe *X* as good Christian gentleman' because *X* has stood for centuries as a mbol for the name of Christ. Finally he adds, 'whose son will so be of the party,' by way of acknowledging the fact that a hall *x* is in use elsewhere in his cryptographic alphabet and ould not be confused with the capital *X* which will serve as his bstitute for *th*.

"So to sum up, Victor took the incomplete alphabet invented y Poe for his story *The Gold-Bug*, filled in the gaps, reversed it, lded additional symbols to disguise the most obvious weak spots any English cipher—that is, the letter *e* and the combination —and arrived at the following." Leaning forward, Ponsonby anded LeBreau a sheet of paper on which he had written out ıese symbols:

a = z	j = q	s = 4
b = :	k = .	t = 3
c = x	l = ‡	u = I
d =]	m = *	v = 8
e = ¶, u or i	n = 9	w = †
f = ?	o = 0	x = —
g = ;	p = k	y = 2
h =)	q = j	z = 5
i = (	r = 6	th = X

LeBreau studied the paper for several seconds. Then he took a eep breath, like a man about to plunge into an icy river, and sked, "And Victor's message?"

Ponsonby picked up a second sheet of paper from the table. I'm afraid it explains a great deal, Rene. We both should have ealized all along that Victor would not have been so foolish as to ıink that any spur-of-the-moment cipher could baffle German xperts for more than a few hours. But of course it wasn't the ermans he was trying to deceive."

"Please," said LeBreau, holding out his hand.

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Ponsonby sighed, and handed the deciphered message to h friend. He himself knew it by heart, so often had he read it ove

"By the time you can read this I will be on my way to Sou America. The code is merely a precaution to assure me of the tin I need in case you should elude the Gestapo. Your name will b their final payment. Then at last, Rene, I shall rival you in weal as in all else. Your triumphant friend, Victor."

LeBreau finished, then slowly crumpled the paper in his han He lifted his haunted eyes to Ponsonby. "How could I have bee so blind, Amos? So completely mistaken?"

"War can do strange things to a man, Rene. I'm sure the Victo Mornier who sent you that message was not the same man you ha known in happier days."

"But all these years I've thought—"

"That he was dead? But even if he wasn't, Rene, even if he still alive somewhere in South America, do you think h conscience has ever given him a moment's rest? A man wh betrayed his friends, his country—"

"No, Amos"—LeBreau gestured feebly—"you don't understand I've known all along that Victor was dead. A neighbor found him few days after the betrayal. The Gestapo had taken him down t his cellar and made him kneel before a crude swastika scratched o the wall and then shot him in the head. I realize now they wer simply ridding themselves of a French traitor who had outlived hi usefulness, but in Gramonte we assumed he'd been executed fo his role in the Resistance. And of course I always believed he' sacrificed a chance to escape just to encipher a message tha thanks to me, never even reached the Allies."

With a groan LeBreau hurled the crumpled paper into th fireplace. "Don't you see, Amos? For twenty-six years I've bee haunted by the guilt that, no matter what was in Victor's messag *I* had betrayed *him.*"

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Richard A. Selzer's first story, "A Single Minute of Fear," in the January 1971 issue of EQMM, was an exceptional debut in print. His second story is just as "filled with suspense and a growing sense of terror," and even goes beyond... It is the story of a "dark place"—the dark place in a cave about two miles from town, and the dark place in the human heart...

"She lay awake and thought about another, deeper darkness, and about how dark it can get, blacker and blacker, but never reaching perfect blackness... And of how they were all living in it..."

This story has a truly haunting quality...

THE DARK PLACE

by RICHARD A. SELZER

Ada heard the commotion all the way to her upstairs back-bedroom, where she had gone to escape the afternoon heat. It came through her drowse, subtly at first, then growing, and finally annoying her into wakefulness. A man was shouting and children were whooping and screaming. She tried to hear but the words were not clear, and she was left wondering. Finally there was an urgency in the voices and in the running feet that made her get up and stand by the front window. She could hear the words clearly now.

"Where?"

"The cave. He was sitting there just inside when they saw him, skinning a possum."

"Who was he?"

"Don't know. The kids said a wild man, thin and white, with wild staring eyes, all dressed in black rags. They hid in the bushes and watched. When they made a sound he turned around to see, then ran into the cave."

"What's going to be done?"

"Well, c'mon, everyone's headin' up there now. They've got ropes, flashlights, and guns—he may be dangerous!"

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The voices faded and Ada looked down on the street burnt dry in the sun. She was trembling, and suddenly it was hard to breathe. "Pippo," she whispered. "Oh, my God, it's Pippo, I know it. I'm certain. It's Pippo!"

She ran down the stairs out into the street. It was empty; they had already left. The whole town. The whole town was just one main street bracketing the old post road, with a few extra houses added carelessly on the periphery. The cave was about two miles from town. There were bobcats up there, and bears. And hardly anyone went up in that tangled mess, except for an occasional hunter or children exploring the woods.

She could see the line of people moving up the path above. They were following a curve on the hill that threw them into her direct vision. The women in their yellow and blue cotton dresses followed the men who marched determinedly ahead. Behind and alongside, the children fluttered like rags. From the distance it looked gay. She ran, and walked and ran until she had caught up with the stragglers.

"There it is," a man called. "All right now, everybody, stand back. Give us room."

Lloyd Bascom had taken charge. She watched him as though she hadn't seen him every day of her life, as though he were a stranger, or rather as if she had suddenly become a stranger and was now peering into the rites of an old and mysterious people. These people were wearing new faces—people she had known all her life. She remembered a game she used to play. It was a terrible game in which she would imagine how each person would look if he were insane. It was remarkable, but she felt that she could tell just what they'd do, how they'd look. Some women would wear timid housedresses, and make their lips go, and once in a while dart a brilliant smile at the far edge of vision. Others, stung with animation, would hop and jump ceaselessly, gesticulating with their skinny arms and legs. And there were those men, private as gorillas, who peered from under great frontal bulges, enraged, dull. She hadn't thought of the game for years, but today it came back to her, and as she looked about at the faces she could see the craziness like an abscess that had pressed its way to just under the skin.

She joined the crowd gathered in an arc in front of the entrance. The children were already climbing trees to get a better view. There were laugh-

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er and chattering among the vomen. Ada stared at the great lank mouth fringed with vhiskery shrubs. She shivered n the rank, cold, sour belch vhich emanated from it. She vatched the men knotting and oiling their ropes, slinging hem easily over their shoul-lers. Flashlights were tested ne final time and a group of ight men separated itself from he body and flowed unstead-y, awkwardly, into the cave. ight quivered on the lips of ne hole for a few moments, nd then it was black again. A lence fell on those outside. here were faint callings and outings from the cave as the xpedition deepened.

Ada stood for a time staring nto the blackness. Then in a uick movement she was at the dge of the cave. Without ealth or backward glance she ipped silently into its shadow, aking as much noise as a ower when it closes for the ight. It was a relief to be side, out of sight. She did not ave to hold herself so tightly. he could breathe! And the nvisibility that the cave be-owed seemed to expand and ee her. If it is Pippo, she ought—yes, it must be.

Far ahead she could see the mping, swaying lights of the unters. They were moving owly.

"Stay close, Bud."

"Where are you, Lloyd?"

"Over here. Look out now. he may be anywhere and we don't know what he's got to throw at us. If there's any question about it, shoot first and find out later."

They had gone about two hundred yards. It seemed like miles to Ada, who followed behind, edging sideways through the darkness and hugging the cold slimy walls. Pippo. My little brother Pippo, she thought. Why? When you didn't come back I went out looking. Didn't you hear me? You said you were going for a walk, and then you never came back. The townspeople search-ed and searched for you, but after a while they gave up.

"He must have fallen and hurt himself," they had said. "Must've been took by a bear or a cat." Oh, how I cried!

The men were moving more slowly. Their voices had been harsh, overlapping, reverberat-ing, but now they were strangely hushed, full of hisses and coughs. There was fear in the cave, and with it, hate. The courage and stamp was now replaced by a clustering, a need to huddle, to back into a safe center where there was no heroism, only a hope that the wild man's blow, when struck, would miss, hit the next man.

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It was cool, and Ada wondered at the sweat that ran from her hair onto her neck and temples. It had a thick slimy feel. There were currents of air on her face, and sound, a clicking, sharp and rapid. With a start she realized its source as a bird flew at her head and swerved off at the last moment. But in the faint light of the nervous men ahead, she saw the red eyes and three-foot wing-spread. Lighter winds touched her, and once she suppressed a scream of surprise at the leathery whisk of a bat across her face. Now and then she could see the undulating carpet of wings and eyes that covered the ceiling. A steady rain of droppings fell to the floor, and the stench of ammonia was biting. The slimy wall of the cave sucked at her nape as she pressed against it.

She had caught up with the men and the walking was a bit easier now, despite the sticky mud of the floor. At least she could see to walk. She marveled at her lack of fear. In its place she felt a kind of elation, as though she were on the brink of a great discovery. They had gone about six hundred yards, and abruptly the cave narrowed to a cone. They could go no farther. They were single file and those behind had bumped into the ones in front.

"Watch out! Looks a
though it ends here. Unles
there's a side path we've misse
somewhere."

"No chance. I've covered i
all with my light," said Lloy
Bascom.

"Where do we go now?"

"Back, I guess. Whatever it i
knows this cave better than w
do and he's hidin' somewhere.
think we'd better get out now.

There was a general shuf
fling, a mixture of disappoint
ment and relief.

"Wait!" The call was sharp
authoritative.

"What is it?"

"Here's an opening!"

The light revealed a hole, n
more than a foot and a half i
diameter, at the level of th
floor. Lloyd was kneeling at th
opening, peering along th
beam of his light.

"It's a few feet long. An
narrow. There's empty spac
beyond—another chambe
looks like. Hey!" he shoute
into it. "Come out of there
Come out or we'll block it up.

"Yeah, block it up, Lloyd.

"No, let's try to get a look a
him first."

They were torn between th
need to escape the wild ma
and his dark place, and the lust
deep and powerful as blood, t
see him, prod him, encircle him

"Let's smoke him out
Here's the tear gas."

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"Yeah."

The arm was raised and ung back for an underhanded ss.

"Stop!" Her voice shocked r. It commanded. There was beggary in it. They wheeled see her. Ada felt thinner and ıaller than she was. She let em assault her with their shlights, let the beams travel ross her body, covering each rt and then lingering on her ːe, blinding her. She stared aight ahead.

"What the hell? Who is it?"

"Ada! Whatcha doin' here?"

"I can get through there," e said quietly. "Give me a shlight and I'll crawl rough."

"No, you won't. Keep out of is, Ada. Now you're here, we ɔn't send you back, but you mn well better stay out of e way."

She headed straight into the arest beam of light. It rrowed to a burning spot on r breast, and she took it from e lax hand that held it.

"Let her do it, Lloyd. If she n get in, she can always get t."

Ada was already on her ees in front of the hole, then t on her face, her thin arms etched in front, one hand abbling in the muddy floor. was tight. For the first foot the way there was hope, then the passage narrowed. The back of her head hit against the rock, and pebbly mud slipped through her lips and between her teeth. Her shoulders wedged, scraped, then slid an inch, the tunnel biting into her flesh with each push. Abruptly strength left her and she lay exhausted. Her heaving chest strained against the floor. It was like a vise that clamped ever tighter, or in which she had somehow swollen.

Behind, the voices of the men whispered. Their feet shuffled as they waited.

"You makin' it, Ada?"

She forced down the panic. Expelling all the air from her lungs she sank the fingers of one hand into the floor, pushing with her feet, pulling with her fingers. She burst through the narrows and felt her shoulders spilling out into space. With a final kick she was inside. It was cool and damp. And still. No currents of air brushed her skin.

Ada rose and turned the flashlight in a tentative circle about her. The floor was covered with dry silt, from which no dust rose as she walked. The humidity must have been absolute, for in a few moments she was dripping with sweat and condensation. The walls were a soft sand-color, and here and there a trickle of

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water ran down, leaving a glistening trail behind. Scurrying out of range of the light were spectral little beasts—white beetles and crayfish and pale pink salamanders. She wondered how they lived here, what they ate. A recess in the wall coned into a path and she followed it, stooping where the ceiling swooped low above her, stepping around small shallow pools in which little insects plopped.

"Pippo!" she called softly. "Pippo, it's me, Ada. Don't be afraid. Pippo, please, if you're here let me know. Pippo!"

Her voice became hollow, with metallic echoes fading at the end. "Pippo!" she called, and the name came back to her with ever-increasing frequency, gaining in urgency and mania, then dying off. She came to another chamber, larger than the first, and stopped at the entrance, scanning the walls. A salamander, caught in the glare, stood poised on the wall. She stepped toward it, then felt the shock of another person's presence.

Her heart triggered like a machine gun, shaking her body with its volley. She aimed the light at the wall opposite her, higher and higher, in slow even sweeps. Suddenly it jumped in her hand like a fish. Something large and black hung on the wall high up. She forced light back with both hands saw him, hanging from a r twenty feet up. Emerging f a tatter of black rags were sticklike appendages, whit milk. The sinews stood out rods with the effort of clin to the wall. A tangle of b hair framed a face whose w skeleton seemed ready to b through the skin.

"Pippo," she breathed. ' Ada. I've found you. C down, don't be afraid. I'm going to hurt you. Oh, Pi I've missed you. Please, pl come down."

She had come closer to and could see the droplet moisture caught in the clou his hair. They glistened winked as he turned his nec stare down behind him. little muscles around his r twitched, snoutlike, and his white eyes reached out for like suckers. Not the sma light of recognition war them. They were animal that spoke directly, witl subtlety, of fright and flight

She was strangely c There was excitement enc to have laid her panting on ground, but her breaths c slowly, evenly. There was wild thudding in her ches was as if she stood in the ey a hurricane, unbuffeted for moment, able to see with s

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larity that her vision burned ack up into her brain.

She took a few small steps ɔward him. The dead-white yes, like picked lilies, never ɛft her. She was close beneath im now and raised her hand ɔward him with deliberate lowness, until her arm was ully extended, fingers strain-ıg.

"Pippo! Reach down. Touch ıe." If only he would touch ıe, she thought. It was with a mall shock that she recognized ɔarts of herself in that face. There had been a strong esemblance, everyone said—like two peas in a pod" or cut from the same cloth." It vas like looking into a crazy nirror where lines undulate vith each breath. There was the ame cleft chin, the same thin ɔval face, and those unfor-unate ears. His nose was hinner, tighter than before, ınd his mouth hung slightly ɔpen. For a single lacerating ıoment she saw herself up here clinging to the cave wall. t was as though his face had given in grudgingly to the changes of the cave, but still ıeld to its family structure and orm.

Even on tiptoe she could not each him and he made no nove toward her. He clung to whatever tiny crevices and uttings were there. From far behind she heard the voices of the men.

"Ada!" they called. "Come back! Now-ow-ow . . ."

Pippo heard them too and his eyes never left her.

She turned then, and cupping her hands to her mouth, called back, "I'm coming . . . There's no one here."

She turned back to him, and in a voice she had never used before, said softly, "Goodbye."

She backed off a few steps, turned the light to the entrance, and walked to the narrow little tunnel.

"I'm coming," she said.

"It's about time. Damn you, Ada, what took so long? We had half a mind to leave you here to rot."

The squeeze through was not half as hard as before, as though the cave itself was not anxious to keep her. She stood up on the other side and faced the converging beams of light.

"It's empty."

"The kids must have made it up. Let's go, Lloyd. This place is bad. Those kids will get the beating of their lives when we get back."

Ada submitted passively to their orders and took her place in line. She moved like a sleepwalker, but still she was calm and felt a queer emotion, hard to identify. She was surprised when she finally

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linked it to a kind of happiness. She caught herself smiling, and as the light at the entrance widened she closed her eyes to hold it out.

The next morning she went to the hardware store and bought a jackknife and a canteen. Mr. Cantrell looked at her for a long questioning moment, then wrapped her purchases and handed her the package in silence. Yesterday he would have asked, "What you want with a knife, Ada? Fixin' to go hunting?" and he would have smiled at any response she gave; but today it was different. Did he suspect her?

Then there was the grocer. She bought cheese and ham and cans of fruit, things she rarely bought, and enough to feed a family. Adam Patterson was a simple man, but that day he asked her, "You layin' in for the winter, Ada, or are you goin' to set up shop in your parlor for competition." Did he suspect, too?

She had mumbled and smiled, and carried home the big brown bag full of food.

Every morning she went to the cave and sat down in the shade of the rock for a few minutes of rest. It was a steep climb and even in the morning the heat and gnats were tiring. Not that she minded, not a bi In fact, she had developed certain taste for the exertio like a long-distance runner wh savors the straining of his bod Resting in the shade, she felt certain peacefulness. She coul see the village down belo straddling the road. On th farms, clumsy cows, release from the barns, were stumblin into each other to get t pasture.

Up here on the mountain i was cool and crackling dry, an the trees were big enough t hold onto a bit of the night even in the midst of day. U here there were no zinnias o roses or asters, no garden stuffed with hollyhocks—mor hollyhocks than people in th town! Only a trillium surprise now and then, or a jack-in-the pulpit just where it belonged.

After a few minutes Ad would rise, take a deep breat as though gulping air befor going underwater, then ste into the darkness of the cave She advanced until she needed to pause and wait for her eye to accommodate to the dark ness, and then walked on. A about twenty yards from the mouth she knelt and put a brown paper bag on the ground. With a smile of satisfaction she noted that yesterday's bag was empty, folded neatly and tucked under a corner of the

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rock. She slipped it out and withdrew, blinking into the daylight.

When she got back to town there was still no one stirring in the streets. The clock on the kitchen wall said 6:30. The whole trip had taken one hour.

On her thirty-first trip to the cave the bag which she had left the day before had not been opened. It was exactly as she had left it. She placed the full new bag alongside it and after pausing as if trying to come to a decision, she abruptly left the cave and went home.

Ada sat for a long time in the chair by the bedroom window. Through dusk she sat, the world filling up with particles of darkness until, with the addition of one more speck, night was realized. At that she rose and walked to the kitchen. She made a tunafish sandwich, wiping the extra mayonnaise carefully from the edges before she wrapped it in waxed paper. Then she selected an apple from a bowl on the table, washed it and polished it on her apron. Together with a napkin full of cookies, she packed the brown paper bag. She had always prepared the food the night before.

That night she did not sleep. She lay awake and thought about another, deeper darkness, and about how dark it can get, blacker and blacker, but never reaching perfect blackness. Like infinity, because there would always be a touch of gray in it. And of how they were all living in it, only in different degrees of the blackness, even at noon, and if you thought of it that way it seemed pure and serene.

When she got to the cave she did not stop to rest from the climb as she usually did, but strode immediately in, taking the darkness on her arms like the sleeves of a robe, which she then pulled close around her. At twenty yards she stopped and saw the two bags, untouched, on the floor. She placed the third one next to the others, took the flashlight from her pocket, and flicking it on, felt her way into the corridor of the cavern.

The slick on the walls sparkled icily in the beam of light. It was as though she had come this way many times, rather than just once before. She knew the juttings and ledges, knew precisely where the soft sound of wings, like that of blankets flapping in the wind, would startle her, precisely when she would have to stop to let her nose adjust to the ammonia smell of the bat droppings. The small black eye of the inner opening gazed gravely up at her, and she knelt, then lay on the slimy floor, her

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arms outstretched before her.

One hand clutching the light, Ada raked at the ground with the other, pulling herself forward. At first she was able to use her hips and knees and quickly came to the narrow part. There she rested, lying limply for a minute in the clutch of stone. Then, bending her ankles as far as she could, she pushed with her toes, pulling all the while with her free hand.

It was slow, and minutes went by seemingly without a jot of progress. She could feel the pain of scrapes on her shoulders and head, and the hard pressure on her chest. She was afraid for only one moment when she felt nausea and thought she might throw up. I mustn't, she thought, and slowed her pace, alternating her thrusts with deep exhalations. There was a sudden little give and she heard herself gasp and moan as the rock cut into her skin.

Her head was free, another gasp. A push, a clawing at nothing, then a tiny twist, a wrench so small as to be imperceptible, yet enough. A shoulder was through, then the other. For a long moment she lay there, then mentally gathering her chest, trunk, abdomen, and legs behind her, like the segments of a worm, she flung her body through to freedom. It did not take long to reach the inner vault. She knew the way each rock and pool.

At the entrance she turned to face the wall where she had first seen him. Her light roved slowly back and forth across the base of the cave, from ceiling to floor. At the bottom, jutting into the circle of light, she saw his foot, white, thin, the delicate toes. Her light moved to include the rest in its pale membrane.

He lay where he had fallen, his moth-white face bent backward, too far back, and twisted on the broken neck. Dark black solid blood surrounded him, pasting his hair to the ground, where white blind beetles and pale salamanders darted and dipped.

Ada took it all in. She had seen it in her mind all day, and felt no surprise or shock. With stately steps she walked to the wall of the cave and ran her hand across it, gathering the slimy mud. She walked to the spot where he lay and descended to one knee. Deliberately she smeared the mud on his face, while the flashlight flickered and danced like a candle.

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

As head of the Division of Violent Crimes, Captain Leopold often tackled unusual cases. This new one seemed routine enough—until they examined the burglar's loot. And then—but as Lieutenant Fletcher liked to say: "Only doing our job, Captain"...

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD DOES HIS JOB

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Snuffy Rogers was in the apartment, working fast, when he saw the flashing red light of the patrol car. He stood by the window for a moment, then picked up the laundry bag full of loot that he'd collected during the past half hour. There was no time to look for any more now.

He dropped from the ground-floor window to the soft earth and hoisted the laundry bag to his shoulder. It had been a profitable night's work, with some unexpected treasures. Perhaps he could even take a month off. Burglary was a dangerous profession—one to be savored rather than devoured—and he knew when to go slow.

He was moving through the blackness of the yard and heading for his car on the next street when he saw the patrolman coming up between the houses. Someone had seen him, or heard him, and called the police. The cop was one of those clever ones—park on the next street and come through the back yards. He should have been a burglar like Snuffy.

"Hold it! I see you!" the patrolman yelled, flashing his light, and Snuffy broke into a run. In his younger days he could have outrun any cop on the force, but things were different now. He was older, had a paunch, and the sack on his shoulder must have weighed close to fifty pounds.

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"Halt or I'll shoot!" the patrolman bellowed, but Snuffy kept on running. He turned the corner of a house, out of range of the cop's gun, and headed toward the street. His car was a block away, but if he made it across the street he thought he'd be safe.

It was nearly midnight and there was no traffic, so he didn't pause at the curb. He was halfway across when the blue sports car rounded the corner, coming fast, and hit him. He saw only the sudden glare of lights and heard a blast from the horn, and then there was a thudding pain, and then there was nothing . . .

The case came to Captain Leopold's attention the following morning, over coffee with Lieutenant Fletcher. It was a bright day in late October, one of those that seemed to hint beguilingly at a return of summer, and Leopold felt good. His duties as head of the department's Violent Crimes Division had unaccountably dropped off in recent weeks. It was almost enough to make one believe that peace and brotherly love had returned to city life.

"We had an interesting one last night, Captain," Fletcher said. "Though I guess it's all cleared up now."

"Family trouble?" Leopold asked, sipping his coffee.

The lieutenant shook his head. "Guy killed by an auto."

"Hit-and-run?" Leopold rarely worried about vehicular homicides. With their wealth of physical evidence they were among the easiest cases to solve.

"No, a girl named Sue Dwyer was driving the car, and she stopped right away. We're getting a statement from her across the hall right now. But the guy she hit was Snuffy Rogers."

"The burglar?"

"None other. And he still had his latest loot in a sack over his shoulder. He'd just worked over an apartment house on Maplewood Crescent, and Hank Duffy was chasing him through the back yards. Snuffy ran into the street and got himself killed."

Leopold poured some more coffee, thankful for the office percolator the boys had given him when he took over in Violent Crimes. The antiquated coffee machine down the hall had a perverse habit of breaking down during an all-night interrogation or the pre-election vice raids, just when it was needed most. "He had quite a record," Leopold commented, remembering Snuffy's familiar little squirrel-face in the morning lineups.

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"Fifteen arrests in the last hree years alone! Fifty-two ears old and he spent half his fe behind bars! But there's an nteresting angle to this one, 'aptain. He was carrying this ark-blue laundry bag full of ot from the apartments—a lock-radio, a portable tape ecorder, a .22-caliber target istol, a batch of costume ewelry, and a piggy bank full f half dollars. But the next em is the interesting one, 'aptain. Snuffy had a lastic-wrapped quantity of ocaine in his sack."

"Cocaine?"

Fletcher nodded. "About a ound. The lab boys are testing o see how pure it is. Could be orth as much as $100,000."

"A good haul for Snuffy. Where'd he get it?"

"That's the problem, 'aptain. Three of the four partments in the house were urglarized, but all four tenants eny the cocaine is theirs."

"I'd hardly expect them to dmit it. Any chance Snuffy ad the stuff in his sack before he robbery?"

"Not likely. Why carry a ound of cocaine with you on a urglary? It wouldn't make ense."

"Who are the four tenants? Anybody we know?"

Fletcher read from the eport in his hand. "Miss Paula Shipley, schoolteacher; Robert Nelson, factory worker; Mr. and Mrs. Ambrose, a retired couple whose apartment wasn't robbed; and the owner of the building, Aaron Stone."

Leopold perked up. "Aaron Stone? On Maplewood Crescent? Didn't his wife commit suicide last summer?"

He went to the file drawer that held the cases he'd closed during the year. Most, happily, had been closed by arrest and conviction. Linda Stone's case had been closed by the Medical Examiner's report.

"Here it is—last July twenty-second. She locked herself in the garage and left the car motor running. Stone found her and called an ambulance, but it was too late. She was only thirty-one, in good health, and she left no note. Her husband could offer no reason for suicide—he seemed really shocked by it. He's in his early forties, fairly well off, and owns a little movie theater in addition to the apartment house. I was thinking of looking for another woman, but the M.E. called it suicide, so we dropped it."

"Think she killed herself because her husband was on cocaine?"

"A unique motive, but an unlikely one. Let's see this girl whose car hit Snuffy."

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Fletcher led him across the hall, where Patrolman Hank Duffy and a plainclothes detective were talking to a blue-eyed girl in her early twenties. Sue Dwyer wore a flashy yellow pants suit that matched her hair, and talked in a swift sure manner that Leopold liked.

"—and then, like I said, I left my boy friend's apartment and started home. The streets were pretty empty and I suppose I was driving a little faster than usual. Anyway, all of a sudden this—man darted out from between two houses and ran into the street. The officer there was chasing him. I slammed on my brakes and hit the horn, but it was too late. The officer told me he was a suspected burglar. He went and called the ambulance on his car radio, but the man was already dead."

Leopold stood on the sidelines, saying nothing, while Officer Duffy and the detective in charge ran through the routine questions. No, she hadn't been drinking. No, Snuffy Rogers hadn't said anything before he died. She'd just stood there, horrified by the dead man at her feet.

Leopold stepped into the hall with Fletcher. "Any chance she was waiting to pick Snuffy up and ran him down instead?"

Fletcher snorted. "You bee reading those mystery nove again, Captain. Snuffy wa fifty-two years old—an ugl little guy with half his teet missing. This gal twenty-three, and real clas There's no connection betwee them. Besides, Snuffy's getawa car was in the next block."

"All right," Leopold sighed "Let's talk to Aaron Stone."

But instead they foun Robert Nelson, a tall bearde youth who worked th midnight shift at Pako Plastics a nearby manufacturer o novelty items. He seemed a first glance to be the mos likely owner of a pound o cocaine, but Leopold ha learned long ago not to jump t conclusions about hairy youn people.

"Stone?" the bearded youth answered their inquiry. "He' down at his theater. Th Franklin Cinema, on Franklin Avenue. He's there mos afternoons and every night since his wife died."

"Then he wasn't in the house during the burglary?"

"Heck no! He was at the theater and Miss Shipley wa out, and I'd just left for work That guy knew when to pick his places."

"What was stolen from your apartment?"

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"A tape recorder and a get pistol that I use netimes."

"That's all?"

"That's all," the bearded uth answered with a grin. hey asked me about the caine, but I never use the iff."

"How did he get into your artment?"

Fletcher interrupted to plain. "He entered Stone's artment first, Captain, rough a ground-floor droom window. He must ve known Stone was at the eater. Cut the screen and osted himself through—you n see his scuff marks on the l. Then, apparently, he found one's set of keys to the other ree apartments. He entered lson's and Miss Shipley's rough the front doors. Mr. d Mrs. Ambrose were at me, though, so he passed em by."

"He must have been in my ace last," Nelson volunteered. 'ou can see his footprints here he dropped out the ndow when he saw the police ming."

Leopold grunted and glanced t the indicated window. lson's apartment was on the ound floor, next to Stone's; iss Shipley and the Ambrose uple lived on the second oor. "Thanks for your help," he told Nelson. "We may be back."

They went up the front stairs to the Ambrose apartment, and Fletcher rang the bell. Presently a wrinkled, elderly face appeared at the door opening. "We don't want none," the woman said. "Go away."

"Police, Mrs. Ambrose. We're checking the burglary."

"He didn't get in here. I thought I heard something at the door, and I saw him going down the steps. That's when I called the police." The door began to close.

"Is Mr. Ambrose in?"

"My husband is confined to bed. He never sees anyone."

The door shut with finality, and Fletcher sighed. "What now, Captain?"

"They hardly seem the cocaine type, so they're probably telling the truth. Snuffy would be too smart to enter an occupied apartment, anyway." He glanced at the opposite door. "Miss Shipley?"

Fletcher nodded and rang the bell. Paula Shipley appeared after a moment, a handsome woman in her late thirties who invited them in without hesitation. "I just got home from school a few minutes ago," she explained. "I teach fifth grade. Let me put on some tea. Or coffee?"

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"Nothing for us," Leopold insisted. "About the robbery—"

The woman moved to the tea pot, her gestures almost masculine. "I was playing bridge with some friends, and it was later than usual when I returned home. The police were already here."

"Just what did he take, Miss Shipley?"

"Some costume jewelry I had in the bedroom. And a clock-radio, too." She tugged nervously at the collar of her dress, as if it were too tight.

Leopold cleared his throat. "You've heard about the narcotics he stole from one of the apartments, Miss Shipley? Any idea which apartment?"

She thought for a moment, then shook her head. "No, this is a quiet place to live. No trouble, no wild parties."

"There was trouble last summer," Leopold reminded her. "Mr. Stone's wife killed herself."

"Yes." She looked away quickly. "A real tragedy. It ruined the poor man. He spends all his time at that theater now."

"Did you have any reason to think it wasn't suicide?" Leopold asked.

"No," she answered slowly. "I don't know what you mean."

"I guess I don't know, either. Thanks for your hel anyway."

She saw them to the doo "Do you think that beard fellow downstairs had tl drugs?"

"We don't know yet. We' looking into it."

They went downstairs ar found Robert Nelson standi by his front door. "She tell yo the cocaine was mine?" H asked.

"No, not really."

"I could tell you some thin about her."

"What sort of things?"

"She has some strang parties up there. And not wit guys."

"I see," Leopold said.

"And the other two—M and Mrs. Ambrose! They' plain wacky! You never eve see him. Maybe he doesn exist."

"That's a possibility, Leopold admitted with a smil

They got in the car an headed for Aaron Stone's movi house. "Which one do yo think had the cocaine? Fletcher asked.

"I really don't know. Th people are victims Fletcher—victims of Snuff Rogers. And here we are tryin to make villains out of them.

"Only doing our job Captain."

"Sure. Got any ideas?"

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"Seems to me Snuffy would ıve quit after he found the ɔcaine. That would make it ıe last apartment he arched."

"Nelson's place."

"It adds up, Captain."

"Snuffy would have quit *if* ɜ knew what he had."

"They didn't call him Snuffy ɔr nothing. He knew."

"They called him Snuffy ɜcause he took snuff in his ɔuth, not because he sniffed ɔcaine. I knew him from way ack, Fletcher. A street ıaracter, a jailbird, a loser all is life. Still, I have to agree. He robably knew cocaine when he ıw it."

They pulled up in front of ıe Franklin Cinema, a eighborhood theater that had en better days. A chain had nloaded it a few years back ecause there was no ɔnvenient parking area, and eopold imagined that Aaron tone had probably purchased cheap. Judging by the ird-rate Italian sex comedy dvertised on the marquee, he ill wasn't drawing crowds.

The theater was not yet pen for the evening's business, ut they found an unlocked oor and went in. Aaron Stone, husky middle-aged man with ay sideburns, was polishing ıe glass on the candy counter. ɛ looked up as they entered, and to Leopold he seemed ten years older than last July, at the time of his wife's suicide. He studied them, but did not seem to recognize Leopold.

"We're investigating the burglary at your apartment house," Leopold explained after they'd introduced themselves.

Stone nodded quickly, nervously. "I just came from headquarters. I wanted to see the loot and help identify it."

"We'll return it soon. All except the cocaine."

"I can't believe that came from any of my tenants."

"He stole it from somewhere. What did he take from you?"

"Only a piggy bank full of half dollars. About twenty dollars, I think. And the keys to the other apartments, of course."

Leopold nodded. Then, "I'm sorry to bring this up, but I investigated the death of your wife last summer. As I remember, you were puzzled by the reason for her suicide."

Stone gave a little nod. "Yes, Leopold—I remember you now. But what does Linda's death have to do with—?"

"Any chance she was on narcotics, that the cocaine was hidden by her in your apartment?"

"Impossible! I would have

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known about anything like that."

"But you still don't know why she killed herself, do you?"

Aaron Stone blinked his tired eyes. "You haven't enough criminals to go after, Captain? You have to come around here making more trouble?" There was an angry sorrow in his voice.

"I just thought there might be a connection," Leopold said, his voice soft, almost apologetic. "Thanks for your time."

They went outside, back to the car, and Leopold kicked at a pile of dead leaves by the curb. Autumn was always a time for regretting things undone, or overdone.

"What do you think, Captain?" Fletcher asked.

"Who knows? Maybe the guy's right. Maybe it's like I said before, about confusing the villains with the victims."

"Only doing our job, Captain."

Leopold sighed and started the car. "I know, Fletcher. You said that before."

It was dark when they reached headquarters, and Patrolman Hank Duffy was just coming out the back door, caught somewhere in that limbo of off-duty hours when there were always reports to be fil or testimony to be given.

"Captain, the owner of th apartment house was do earlier," he said. "I showed h Snuffy's loot. Hope it was right."

"Sure, as long as he didi steal any of it."

Duffy hesitated on the ste "It seemed to upset him."

"The cocaine?"

"The lab boys still have th No, I mean the rest of the stu It really made him uptight."

"People sometimes act th way when they've been robbe Go home and get some slee Hank."

The officer grinned tiredl "I've had my four hours. No I'm going back on duty."

They went upstairs Leopold's office at the rear the second floor, and l glanced through th accumulation of messages a reports on his desk. "I suppo I'd better take a look Snuffy's loot, too," he sa finally.

"It's beginning to look like job for Narcotics rather th Violent Crimes, Captain."

Leopold nodded. "I'll turn over to them after I examir Snuffy's loot."

Fletcher came back with carboard box and they sprea the things on the table h Leopold's window. A pigg

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bank painted with daisies, a tangled cluster of costume jewelry, a target pistol, a portable tape recorder, a clock-radio. "Nothing unusual here, Captain. We'll probably give it back to the robbery victims tomorrow."

Leopold shook the piggy bank and then opened the bottom, letting the half dollars spill out. "The cocaine couldn't have been hidden in any of these things, could it?"

"Not a chance, Captain. The package is bigger than a brick."

Leopold's fingers were busy untangling Miss Shipley's jewelry. Several of the pieces had the monogram *S* on them, and a few had *LS*. He studied them for a time and then lifted the target pistol to see if it was loaded. It was not.

Leopold put down the pistol. "Come on, Fletcher. I've got an idea."

"You know where the cocaine came from?"

"Right now that's the least of my worries."

It was just after eight o'clock when they pulled up in front of Aaron Stone's apartment house. The place was ablaze with lights now, as houses usually were immediately after a successful burglary. Stone didn't answer his bell, and neither did Miss Shipley, but they had better luck with Nelson. He came to the door in his pajamas, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

"I gotta go to work in a few hours. Can't a guy get some rest around here?"

"We're looking for Miss Shipley," Leopold said.

"If she's not home she probably went to the movies."

"The movies?"

"Stone is always giving us free passes to his theater."

Leopold nodded and started down the steps.

"We're going to the movies?" Fletcher asked.

Leopold nodded. "To the movies."

The picture had already started and the theater was dark as they entered and brushed past the ticket taker. Aaron Stone was not at the candy counter, and the manager's office was empty. "Where is he?" Leopold asked.

The youth at the door looked scared. "Mr. Stone? He runs the projector. Is this a raid?"

Leopold glanced at the dancing images on the screen. "Not yet."

There were perhaps a dozen people in the darkened theater, mere heads silhouetted against the screen. None of them looked like Miss Shipley. "Where is she, Captain?" Fletcher asked.

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"Maybe upstairs with Stone. Come on."

They made their way up a narrow staircase to a door marked: *No Admittance.* It was locked and Leopold pounded on it, not worrying about the noise. After a moment Aaron Stone appeared. "You can't come in here," he said.

"We're in," Leopold told him. The projection room was small and hot, with a shaded bulb giving enough light to show them the two bulky metal monsters that hummed and fumed and alternately gave life to the screen below. There were open film cans on a table, and fat reels of 35-millimeter movie film waiting their turn at the projectors.

"What do you want?" Stone asked, leaning awkwardly to one side as if pulled down by a weight in his pocket. "Can't you see I'm working?" He turned to peer out the little window of the booth, watching the screen until the mark in the upper right corner signaled him to switch to the other projector. One monster died and the other came alive, with no break in the action below. On the screen a half-naked girl continued running through a field of tall grass.

"Where's Miss Shipley?" Leopold asked. "Nelson said she might be here."

"Haven't seen her. My projectionist quit last week and I've been stuck up here."

"I wanted to ask you something more about the robbery."

"Still on that? Still trying to tie the cocaine to me?"

"To your house."

"I don't know a thing about it."

"Then let me ask you about your wife's suicide," Leopold said quietly, staring down at the screen where the half-naked girl had given way to a rural wedding party.

"What about it?"

Leopold glanced around at Fletcher. "Wait for me downstairs. I won't be long."

"What about it?" Stone repeated when they were alone.

But Leopold did not answer immediately. His eyes were on the movie screen, watching the images dance about with a life of their own. "I suppose," he said at last, "that a man could come to think of himself as something of a god if he stayed up here long enough, running the projectors and giving those people life."

"Do you have something to say to me, Captain?"

Leopold turned to face him in the dimly lit booth. "I have a great deal to say to you, Mr. Stone. First I'll say that you have a pistol in the pocket of

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your pants. I can see its outline quite clearly through the fabric."

"I—"

"You were planning to kill Miss Shipley, weren't you?"

"How did you know that?"

"It's my business to know things, Mr. Stone. They said the sight of the robbery loot upset you, and I wondered why. Then I looked it over and I saw what you saw. The costume jewelry stolen from Paula Shipley's bedroom did not belong to her, did it? The initials on some pieces were not *PS*, but *LS*. Not Paula Shipley, but Linda Stone."

"She stole it!" Aaron Stone muttered. Behind him, the projector hummed and flickered.

"I don't think so, or the sight of it wouldn't have upset you quite that much. Your wife gave that jewelry to Paula Shipley; didn't she? Nelson told me about the parties, about the things Miss Shipley did. Your wife got too deeply involved with her, and suicide was the only way out. You never knew it, did you? Not till today when you saw that jewelry."

"No," he mumbled, and his eyes began to water. "I never knew it. I always thought she killed herself because of me."

"Give me the gun," Leopold said quietly.

"What?"

"Give me the gun. You aren't going to use it."

"No," Stone said. "I suppose not." He slipped the pistol from his pocket and handed it over. "But how did you know I was planning to kill her?"

"Mr. Stone, if it had been my wife, I'd have been thinking of murder, too."

He went downstairs then, to where Fletcher was waiting. "Pretty good picture, Captain. Want to stay for it?"

"Not tonight, Fletcher."

"What happened? Did you solve it?"

"I did better than that, Fletcher. I prevented it."

"Huh?"

In the outer lobby they found Paula Shipley just entering, about to use one of her free passes. Leopold took her gently by the arm and turned her toward the door. "Come on, Miss Shipley," he said, in a voice both quiet and firm. "You're too late for the movie tonight. We'll drive you home."

In the morning Fletcher poked his head into Leopold's office. "Come across the hall, Captain," he said with a grin. "I've got something that'll interest you."

Leopold followed him to the Interrogation Room and saw

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that it was Sue Dwyer, sitting in the same chair she'd occupied the previous morning. But there was something different about her this time. Her left eye was bruised and blackened, swollen shut. "Tell the Captain what you told me," Fletcher said.

She turned to Leopold, her voice barely a whisper. "Nothing like this ever happened to me before. He *never* beat me before!"

"Who beat you?" Leopold asked.

"My boy friend. When I told him what I did."

"That you killed a man wi your car?"

"No, about the cocain After the accident I was afra the police would find it in t glove compartment. So wh the officer went to radio for a ambulance I slipped it into t bag that burglar was carrying

"I see," Leopold said.

"I know it was worth a l of money, but he didn't have t *beat* me!"

"Well," Leopold said, tryi not to look at Fletche "suppose you tell us all abo it."

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SA
Creasey, John	VOTE FOR THE TOFF	Walker & Co.	4.95	11/8
Hubin, Allen J. (Editor)	BEST OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES (Twenty-fifth Anniversary Collection)	E. P. Dutton	6.95	Nov.
Johnson, E. Richard	CASE LOAD – MAXIMUM	Harper & Row	5.95	11/17
Lockridge, Richard	DEATH IN A SUNNY PLACE	J. B. Lippincott	5.50	12/7
Mann, Jessica	A CHARITABLE END	McKay-Washburn	4.95	11/1
Marric, J. J.	GIDEON'S ART	Harper & Row	5.95	11/24
Masur, Harold Q. (Editor)	MURDER MOST FOUL (The 1971 Mystery Writers of America)	Walker & Co.	5.95	11/30

Titles and Data Supplied by the Publishers

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A possible explanation of one of the most baffling, heartrending and significant murder mysteries of our time . . .

AGONY COLUMN

by BARRY N. MALZBERG

entlemen:
I enclose my short story, *Three for the Universe*, and hope you ill find it right for your magazine, *Astounding Spirits.*
Yours very truly,
Martin Miller

ear Contributor:
Thank you for your recent submission. Unfortunately, though we have read it with great interest, we are unable to use in *Astounding Spirits.* Due to the great volume of submissions e receive we cannot grant all contributors a personal letter, but ou may be sure that the manuscript has been reviewed carefully id its rejection is no comment upon its literary merit but may be pendent upon one of many other factors.
Faithfully,
The Editors

ear Editors:
The Vietnam disgrace must be brought to an end! We have lost i that stained soil not only our national honor but our very ture. The troops must be brought home and we must remember at there is more honor in dissent than in unquestioning silent reement.
Sincerely,
Martin Miller

ear Sir:
Thank you for your recent letter to the Editors. Due to the eat volume of worthy submissions we are unable to print every ood letter we receive and therefore regretfully inform you that

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while we will not be publishing it this is no comment upon the value of your opinion.

Very truly yours,
The Editors

Dear Congressman Forthwaite:

I wish to bring your attention to a serious situation which is developing on the West Side. A resident of this neighborhood for five years now, I have recently observed that a large number of streetwalkers, dope addicts, and criminal types are loitering at the intersection of Columbus Avenue and 72nd Street at almost all hours of the day, offending passers-by with their appearance and creating a severe blight on the area. In addition, passers-by are often threateningly asked for "handouts" and even "solicited." I know that you, with me, share a concern for a Better West Side and look forward to your comments on this situation as well as some kind of concrete action.

Sincerely,
Martin Miller

Dear Mr. Millow:

Thank you for your letter. Your concern for our West Side is appreciated and it is only through the efforts and diligence of constituents such as yourself that a better New York can be conceived. I have forwarded your letter to the appropriate precinct office in Manhattan and you may expect to hear from them shortly.

Yours truly,
Alwyn D. Forthwaite

Dear Gentlemen:

In May of this year I wrote Congressman Alwyn D. Forthwaite a letter of complaint concerning conditions on the Columbus Avenue-West 72nd Street intersection in Manhattan and was informed by him that this letter was passed on to your precinct office. Since four months have now elapsed and since I have neither heard from you nor observed any change in the conditions pointed out in my letter, I now write to ask whether or not that letter was forwarded to you and what you intend to do about it.

Sincerely,
Martin Miller

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Dear Mr. Milner:

Our files hold no record of your letter.

Yours truly,
N. B. Karsh
Captain, #33462

Dear Sirs:

I have read Sheldon Novack's article in the current issue of *Cry* with great interest, but feel that I must take issue with his basic point which is that sex is the consuming biological drive from which all other activities stem and which said other activities become only metaphorical for. This strikes me as a bit more of a projection of Mr. Novack's own functioning than that reality which he so shrewdly contends he apperceives.

Sincerely,
Martin Miller

Dear Mr. Milton:

Due to the great number of responses to Sheldon A. Novack's *Sex and Sexuality: Is It All Repressive?* in the August issue of *Cry*, we will be unable to publish your own contribution in our *Cry from the City* column, but we thank you for your interest.

Yours,
The Editors

Dear Mr. President:

I was shocked by the remarks apparently attributed to you in today's newspaper on the public assistance situation. Surely you must be aware of the fact that social welfare legislation emerged from the compassionate attempt of 1930 politics to deal with human torment in the systematized fashion and although many of the cruelties you note are inherent to the very system, they do *not* cast doubt upon its very legitimacy. Our whole national history has been one of coming to terms with collective consciousness as opposed to the law of the jungle and I cannot understand how you could have taken such a position as you did.

Sincerely,
Martin Miller

Dear Mr. Meller:

Thank you very much for your letter of October 18th to the

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President. We appreciate your expression of interest and assure you that without the concern of citizens like yourself the United States would not be the great country it has become. Thank you very much and we do look forward to hearing from you in the future on matters of national interest.

Mary L. McGinnity
Presidential Assistant

Gentlemen:

I enclose herewith my article, *Welfare: Myth or Fact?* which I hope you may find suitable for publication in *Insight Magazine.*

Very truly yours,
Martin Miller

Dear Contributor:

The enclosed has been carefully reviewed and our reluctant decision is that it does not quite meet our needs at the present time. Thank you for your interest in *Insight.*

The Editors

Dear Senator Partch,

Your vote on the Armament Legislation was shameful.

Sincerely,
Martin Miller

Dear Dr. Mallow:

Thank you for your recent letter to Senator O. Stuart Partch and for your interest in the Senator's recent voting record.

L. T. Walters
Congressional Aide

Dear Susan Saltis:

I think your recent decision to pose nude in that "art photography" series in *Men's Companion* was disgraceful, filled once again with those timeless, empty rationalizations of the licentious which have so little intrinsic capacity for damage except when they are subsumed, as they are in your case, with abstract and vague "connections" to platitudes so enormous as to risk the very demolition of the collective personality.

Yours very truly,
Martin Miller

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lear Sir:

With pleasure and in answer to your request, we are enclosing a hotograph of Miss Susan Saltis as she appears in her latest movie, Chariots to the Holy Roman Empire."

Very truly yours,
Henry T. Wyatt
Publicity Department

entlemen:

I wonder if *Cry* would be interested in the enclosed article hich is not so much an article as a true documentary of the sults which have been obtained from my efforts, over recent onths, to correspond with various public figures, entertainment ars, etc., etc. It is frightening to intimate the obliteration of self hich the very devices of the 20th Century compel, and perhaps our readers might share my (not so retrospective) horror.

Sincerely,
Martin Miller

ear Sir:

As a potential contributor to *Cry* I am happy to offer you our Writer's Subscription Discount." For $5.50 you will receive not nly a full year's subscription to *Cry* (28% below newsstand rates, 4% below customary subscriptions) but in addition our year-end ecial issue, *Cry in the Void*, at no extra charge.

Subscription Dept.

ear Contributor:

Thank you very much for submitting your article entitled *lienation*. It has been considered here with great interest and it is ie consensus of the Editorial Board that while it has unusual erit it is not quite for us. We thank you for your interest in *Cry* id look forward to seeing more of your work in the future.

Sincerely,
The Editors

ear Congressman Forthwaite:

Nothing has been done about the conditions I mentioned in my tter of almost a year ago. Not one single thing!

Bitterly,
Martin Miller

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Dear Mr. Mill:

Please accept our apologies for being so late in answering your good letter of March 25th. Congressman Forthwaite has been involved, as you know, in the Food Investigations and has of necessity allowed some of his important correspondence to await his detailed attention.

He thanks you for your warm expressions of interest.

Yours truly,
Ann Ananauris
Secretary

Dear Sir:

The Adams multiple-murders are indeed interesting, not only for their violence, but because of the confession of the accused that he "did it so that someone would take notice of me." Any citizen can understand this—the desperate need to be recognized as an individual, to break past bureaucracy into some clear apprehension of one's *self-worth*, is one of the most basic of human drives but is becoming increasingly frustrated today by a technocracy which allows less and less latitude for the individual to articulate his own identity and vision and be heard. Murder is easy; it is easy in the sense that the murderer does not need to embark upon an arduous course of training in order to accomplish his feat; his excess can come from the simple extension of sheer human drives aided by basic weaponry. The murderer does not have to cultivate "contacts" or "fame" but can simply, by being *there*, vault past nihilism and into some clear, cold connection with the self. More and more, the capacity for murder lurks within us; we are narrow and driven, we are almost obliterated from any sense of existence; we need to make that singing leap past accomplishment and into *acknowledgement.* Perhaps you would print this letter?

Dear Sir:

Thank you for your recent letter. We regret being unable to use it due to many letters of similar nature being received, but we look forward to your expression of interest.

Sincerely,
N. Burnside
Editor, Books Section

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ar Mr. President:
I intend to assassinate you and swear to you that you will not
e out the year. It will come by rifle or knife, horn or fire, dread
water, but it will come, and there is no way you can Avoid that
dgement to be Rendered upon you.

Seriously,
Martin Miller

ar Mr. Miller:
As you know, the President is abroad at the time of this writing
t you may rest assured that upon his return your letter, along
th thousands of other similar expressions of interest, will be
ned over to him, and I am sure that he will appreciate your
ving written.

Very truly yours,
Mary L. McGinnity
Presidential Assistant

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 361st "first story" to be published by Eller Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a sprightly tale, brightly tooled breezily told . . .

While an English major at Santa Barbara City College, Santa Barbara, California, the author, Raymond D. Stenzel, ha some of his writing published in the college literary magazin and in 1968 he was judged the best creative writer on campu For the next three years he "held down a series of jobs rangin from sailmaker to motorcycle salesman, and slowly filled ragged cardboard box with stories, parts of The Grea American Novel, a small collection of rejection slips, an encouraging notes" — the last written by himself to himself.

Mr. Stenzel calls himself "a cliche." He doesn't "quite liv in a garret here in Berkeley, but most of the other bromide concerning the struggling writer seem to apply." Perhaps the do — now. But we'd bet that this bright new writer will "mak it" . . .

THE CASE OF THE UNTRACEABLE GUNS

by RAYMOND D. STENZEL

Consider the double-barreled shotgun.

This classic weapon, in one form or another, has been around a good while, but it took a bird-blasting English gunsmith named Henry Nock to bring out the real potential of the shotgun. Henry felt there were some serious drawbacks in the design of his favor flintlock, such as being slow fire and having very heavy a unwieldy barrels. Henry felt was a day's work just to dra bead on an unsuspecting p eon. So he put his cunn English mind to work on problem and came up with new breech design that not o

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duced a spectacular increase ate of fire, but resulted in a uction in barrel lengths, with sequent loss of weight. A it number of pigeons left land.

Henry Nock's new design did endear him to the bird ulation of Seventeenth Cen- England, but he had made double gun practical. And ein lies the charm and bility of the double-bar- d shotgun. Practicality. e Henry's time, the versatile ble has been many things. function at weddings has ome part of American lore. It has produced a few erals here and there. Ask the ia. Its members call it the *ra*, and it is a favorite eral-making instrument for Sicilian social club.

Fred Wenton knew nothing ll these fascinating historical iculars concerning the shot- . He was not large on nteenth Century gun- hs, but he knew a little bit ut the Mafia, having oc- onally supplied the *lupera* one or another grim leman who came calling at back door in the dead of t.

Knock, knock.

Who's there?"

The Mafia. Gimme a gun."

Right. Here. Two hundred ars, please."

"Right. *Mil grazie*, Fred."

"You're welcome, Dominic."

Fred might read in the newspapers a day or so later of the sudden demise of one of his fellow human beings, but that was none of his business. His business was supplying shotguns. He would supply other types of guns now and then, but primarily the basic twelve-gauge was his staple item. He knew that none of the weapons he supplied could ever be traced back to him, for his methods of acquiring his lethal stock-in-trade were dim and subtle, and he never, never bought back a gun once he had sold it at his back door.

This situation of untraceable guns naturally drove various members of law-enforcement agencies crazy. Every time they went out to investigate a violent demise, they invariably recovered enough evidence in the form of slugs, pellets, bullets, and other flattened-out pieces of metal to ascertain positively that they came from one particular weapon and no other. That was nice, because they always recovered a weapon, too.

These facts should have made the police very happy, for the science of ballistics and the identification of weapons being what it is today, assiduous

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examination of the recovered gun should have given the hard-working police scientists some results, such as where the weapon originated, which in turn should have given the hard-working investigating officers A Clue to the persons obtaining said weapon.

Fat chance.

It was as if the persons causing the particular demise had procured their instrument out of thin air, used it once, and tossed it away like an empty beer can. As a matter of fact, a beer can might have been easier to work with than the guns the police were faced with. Serial numbers were gone so completely that even acid would not bring them out of the metal; barrels had been changed; automatics had been modified; revolvers didn't revolve; shotguns—ah, shotguns. Old bird-shooting Henry Nock wouldn't have recognized one of his little toys after businessman Fred Wenton got through with it.

The situation, as noted, disturbed the mental equilibrium of law officers considerably.

"It's driving me nuts!" stated Phil Stone, one of the more excitable cops in the detective section of Midwest City's police force. He was a hard-driving, cigar-smoking, dedicated cop who stood five feet eleven inches tall in heavy brogues. He had recei two departmental citations bravery, and he had an e tattooed on his left forearm. was a proud cop, and a g one. A little excitable, that's

Detective Stone's excita ity was taking place at the sc of the latest discovery o victim who had encounte several dozen buckshot. fact that the shot had b traveling in excess of 100 per second undoubtedly counted for the general m iness of his physical condit Also the fact that he wa breathing.

"Gently, Phil, gently," plied Stone's partner, Detec Roger Weems. He rose from kneeling position beside body and patted Stone so ingly on the shoulder.

"Gently my Aunt Fann shot back Stone pithily. "' is the ninth hood this mo who's been wiped out b shotgun. The eight before one were hit by eight diffe shotguns and it's a safe bet one will be, too."

Detective Weems loo confused. "Phil, he's alre been—"

"I know that, dummy! I see, can't I? Shotgun! different shotgun will be—h dammit, Roger!" St stomped angrily out of

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ıotel room wherein lay hood umber nine, leaking all over ıe threadbare carpet. Weems ırugged, philosophic resigna- on written all over his long ony face. He gestured to the ıb men to continue their work n and around the body, and ollowed his partner outside.

"Outside" was the parking rea for a somewhat rundown ıotel just inside the city limits. he two detectives had arrived t the motel a half hour earlier, aving been the only team vailable at headquarters when ıe squeal concerning the late umber nine had come in. In ccordance with police practice, ıtching the squeal also made ıem responsible for the ensu- ıg investigation. It was remark- ɔly bad luck that they had also ıught all eight of the previous ıotgunning squeals.

Weems found Stone sourly bserving the half-dozen patrol- ıen summoned to the scene ho were searching the im- ıediate area for clues and/or ıe murder weapon. Not that ther would do much good, one thought. The weapon ould undoubtedly be another ıtraceable shotgun and a clue ould have to have a sign on it ying I AM A CLUE before ıy of these—

"They find anything yet, ıil?" Weems's voice broke into s thoughts.

"Nah." Stone was soothing his jagged nerves and polluting the air with a ten-cent cigar. "They all need seeing-eye dogs."

Weems was about to answer when he saw one of the blue-clad patrolmen lurch and fall headfirst into the bushes bordering one of the motel cabins. Fluent blasphemy mingled with the crashing of branches as the patrolman floundered about trying to regain his feet.

"See what I mean?" snorted Stone disgustedly.

"Mack Sennett would have loved these guys."

"He's carrying something, Phil. Looks like a—"

"Don't tell me. A shotgun."

A few hours later the two detectives stood around a long table in the headquarters laboratory listening to a technician summarizing what exhaustive tests on the recovered shotgun had revealed. The weapon itself lay on the table in bits and pieces.

The technician was a short broad little man named Gould. He was an expert in laboratory analysis. He was expert because he had gone to school. He knew things. His was a keen, analytical mind that attacked each problem his fellow officers brought him with educated expertise and conscientious

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dispatch. He administered his tests, compared his various cross-index files, consulted his many complex charts, and came up with intelligent conclusions to aid his brother officers.

"What we have here," declared Gould expertly, "is a shotgun."

Stone and Weems glanced at each other. A small identical sigh escaped from each man. Their patient stares returned to Gould.

The little man was oblivious. He had got to be expert by being thorough.

"This shotgun," he continued, "is a rather old one, apparently manufactured around 1928 or so. Though all identifying marks and numbers have been removed, the styling is that of an Ithaca, what is commonly known as a trap-and-field gun. It has undergone extensive modifications, probably in an attempt to disguise it and also make it more readily—"

"Gould," said Stone.

"—portable. The barrels have been sawed off, the stock replaced with a wire frame arrangement—"

"Gould," said Weems.

"—and there appears to be—"

"*GOULD!*" said Stone and Weems.

"What?"

"Can this gun be traced bac to anyone? Do your files sho a match in the slugs? Was it sol in Midwest City? Can we fin out who owned it?"

Gould looked at the disa sembled weapon on the la table, looked at the ceilin looked back at the waitin detectives, and shook his hea He watched dispiritedly as th two men walked out. He kne they were on the way to th Chief's office to report anothe untraceable gun. He turne back to his table and idl moved the pieces of the gu around.

"Where did you come fron gun?" he said softly.

"How do I know where the come from?" shouted Chief c Police Sanders into his tel phone. While he shouted, h eyes never left the uncon fortable figures of Stone an Weems standing in a sort c loose parade rest in front of h desk. The two could hear fain ducklike sounds coming fro the Chief's receiver.

"Charlie, there are n records of those guns being sol anywhere in the area, th teletype to other cities com up with nothing, the F.B. doesn't make them, and w don't have the time or th facilities to investigate ever gun store in every state to th to match up weapons that ha

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the time we're not even sure started out as weapons! Now, tell your editor he should be happy it's hoods getting wiped out and not law-abiding citizens! We're working on it!"

Sanders slammed the phone back on its cradle and glared at it. He looked up. "Well, speak."

Stone spread his hands in a gesture of futility. "Same old story, Chief," he said. "A different gun, and untraceable. That makes—"

"I know how many it makes, Stone," said the Chief in a low dangerous voice. "I am tired of the war we have going on in this city, gentlemen. I am tired of it, the Commissioner is tired of it, the citizenry are tired of it, the—"

"I imagine George the Fink was tired of it, too, Chief," interrupted Weems brightly.

"And who might George the Fink be, Weems?"

"He's the latest hood what got shot, Chief," said Weems, smiling.

"Weems?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Shut up."

"Yes, sir."

"The thing is, Chief," interposed Stone, "that we don't seem to have a way of stopping the war. Johnson's mob is bound and determined to move in on Edwards' territory and Edwards ain't having any. So they're shootin' the bejabbers out of each other. Everytime we round up a bunch of 'em, their lawyers have them right back out on the streets again. None of them are carrying guns, none of them are breaking the law."

"Murder is against the law, Stone."

"I know that, Chief, but how are we gonna pin it on the slobs? There's never been an eyewitness yet and there's not likely to be as long as the pattern keeps up the way it has."

"The ambushing, you mean," said Sanders.

"Yeah. Instead of out-and-out battles they're tracking each other down until one guy spots another's hideout and blooey! that's all she wrote. Personally, I say good riddance."

The Chief chuckled. It was a bitter sound, but nonetheless it was mirth.

"So would I, Stone, but it *is* making us look bad. As long as they have a supply of guns that we can't connect up with them, we're going to keep on looking bad. And that's got to stop, understand?"

"We understand, Chief. Both mobs are doing the same thing, so Weems and I figure they've got to be using the same source, unbeknownst to each other."

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"Find me that source, Stone. We've got to get those hoods back to carrying their own guns so we can arrest them when they shoot somebody. Find me that source!"

At that moment the source was quite a few states away from the irate Chief of Police. The source was minding his own business, which at the moment consisted of combing his thinning gray hair. Fred Wenton's reflection in the mirror showed him a somewhat plump, fiftyish individual, with guileless blue eyes and a general demeanor of well-being. All in all, he felt, a picture of a slightly more than well-to-do businessman who perhaps traveled a lot. Which was natural, he *did* travel a lot.

Fred finished combing his hair and left the restroom of the service station where he had stopped to fill up his micro-bus. He settled his bill and carefully entered the stream of southbound traffic.

At about the same time that Stone and Weems were sitting glumly down to an early supper before hitting the streets to try once again to make some sense out of their case, Fred Wenton carefully drove his bus up a rutted dirt road that led crookedly to a ramshackle farmhouse somewhere in Georgia. As he turned off the engine, several long and skinny hounds ambled out to sniff at the tires and howl mournful imprecations at the early evening sky. He quieted them down with soothing words born of long practise in dealing with Southern houndhood, and made his way to the rickety front porch.

"Hold 'er right there, mister," said a voice from within.

Unsurprised, Wenton stopped, holding out his hands to show they were empty. At these moments Fred felt he was back in frontier days, when the weary wayfarer often took his life in his hands as he approached a homestead after dark. In a way, he was; your average Southern cracker has a long memory. He also is poor and therefore hangs onto what little he has, passing on what property he has managed to accumulate over the years to his sons, who in turn hang onto it some more before finally passing it on to *their* sons. The knowledge of this ingrained habit was making Fred Wenton a rich man.

"I should like to discuss a little business with you, my good man," said Fred. He approached the door and proffered a small oblong of white cardboard.

The lank specimen of suspicious Southern sharecropper took the card and peered at it.

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"Aunty-kews? What's them?"

"Allow me to explain, my ear fellow," said Fred, suavely shering himself into the house. One pronounces the word n-*teeks*,' the word meaning—" he door closed behind him. utside, the skinny hounds ratched and swore at each her.

An hour and some minutes ter Fred Wenton was on the ad again, heading for another olated farm farther up the ountain. Carefully stored in e back were a kerosene lamp, mplete with chimney and ick trimmer, a well-used tter churn, one worn-out njo, circa 1890, and one elve-gauge double-barreled otgun, circa 1910.

Back at the tiny farm he had st left, the lank cracker rned from counting the crisp lls Fred had given him to face s equally lank wife.

"That feller musta been azy, Berthie," he growled. 'ayin' good money fer them d things. Why, I cain't even member where I got that old attergun—it's been kickin' ound here fer years."

"I hope it blows up in his e," snarled Berthie savagely. Vhy'd you hafta go and sell y one and only butter churn, rn ye?"

"Aw, shet yer dern mouth, oman."

Eventually Fred Wenton returned home. As the microbus swung into the crushed gravel driveway of Fred's combination home and place of business, its headlights illuminated the tasteful clapboard sign he had erected on the front lawn. In a bold Spencerian script the black letters spelled out: *Frederick Wenton, Antiques.*

As he unloaded his gleanings of aged Southern Americana, Fred was looking forward with pleasure to getting down to his basement workship with certain of his trophies, there to work his unique brand of magic. He had in mind a fine Parker Knockabout he had picked up in Waycross. That should take very well to his basic sculpturing instrument, a Shur-Cut hacksaw.

Had Fred Wenton, hacksawer extraordinary, known the part his fine Parker Knockabout would play in his future life, he would have melted the thing down to slag forthwith. But he didn't, so he spent several happy hours in his workshop filing, sawing, rearranging, and generally transmogrifying the stately old shotgun into a cut-down, compact, contemporary cannon.

The blued-steel double barrels, originally 30 inches long, now measured less than 12. The

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superbly tapered stock, with its ritzy Monte Carlo comb, had been brutally hacked off and replaced with a pistol grip from a German machine pistol, and the distinctive Parker trigger guard was gone altogether. Only an expert eye could now tell what the little blaster had once been. Fred thought, proudly, that it was one of his best efforts.

In due course the much-modified Knockabout went into underworld circulation, via the knock-knock route at Fred's back door. Shortly thereafter a two-bit hood from the Johnson mob went *out* of circulation. Permanently.

Once again Stone and Weems found themselves in technician Gould's laboratory. Both detectives were showing signs of strain, but Gould was all but bubbling with good spirits.

"Well, you boys have quite a find this time," said Gould. "As you may know, I've had to do a lot of studying and research on shotguns since all this started. Did you know a guy named Henry Nock invented—?"

"What have you got, Gould?" interrupted Stone heavily.

"You certainly don't have to get huffy about it," sniffed Gould. "To begin: it's a very fine old Parker Knockabout. Unlike most of the weapons you've brought me, this c number is of such quali manufacture that it couldn't completely disguised. In the c days, when this one was mac the old gunsmiths used lamin ed steel and Circassian w nut—"

In that part of his bra which made Stone such a go detective, something went clic

"Gould, why do you ke saying 'old' like that?" asked, his eyes narrowi intently.

"Because it is. You don't s many of these around muc

"The one before this w made around 1928, didn't y say?"

"Why, yes, I suppose I d But this—"

Excitement began to cre into Stone's voice. "How abo the ones before that? Were th old, too?"

"Why, it's hard to say. T or three of them were certair old, but there's really no way tell exactly when most of the were made. They were disguised, you see."

"Old guns," said Sto looking at Weems narrowly.

"Old *shot*guns," said Weer looking narrowly back at Sto

"Are you guys having a w surmise?" asked Gould. I levity was wasted; his audien of two was gone.

In police parlance t

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egoing is usually referred to A Break. This means that the estigators have finally put ;ether some related facts, or ınd a common denominator, l come up with a definite ad. Logically, one would ›pose, Stone would im-diately head for the teletype .ts and begin inquiries as to es of *new* shotguns anywhere hin a reasonable area around dwest City. Since all these shotguns were cluttering up ice headquarters, presum-y they had also cluttered up neone's home at one time, l presumably the home ners would wish to replace ir *old*—but you see what is ant.

But, perhaps because of ›ne's excitability, or the ain of the long investigation, both, the detectives did not this. They had their nmon denominator—that all murder weapons (well, ne of them, anyway) were —and that could mean only e thing.

They went out and arrested director of the local seum.

The bewildered official ıldn't believe it. Here were › gimlet-eyed, hard-faced ectives accusing *him* of ›plying old shotguns to the y's underworld. Ridiculous.

"That's ridiculous!" stated the director, with some feeling. "The museum does have a collection of historical weapons, to be sure, but I certainly am not selling them to the Cosa Nostril!"

"Cosa Nostra," corrected Weems. "Let's search the joint, Phil. Up against the wall, you!"

"Wait a minute, Roger," said Stone. His excitement had cooled somewhat in the dignified atmosphere of the museum. Now that he thought it over, it did seem a little far-fetched, common denominator or no.

"Mr. Director, where do you get the guns for your collection?" he asked. "Specifically, your old shotguns?"

"Shotguns? Shotguns. Well, some we receive from private collections, of course. We get some nice pieces that way. Primarily, though, our field men procure examples of American weaponry directly from private individuals who—"

"Field men?" said Stone.

"Private individuals?" said Weems.

"Yes. Our representatives travel about constantly, visiting areas in the country where families retain artifacts of the past as a matter of course. When they discover something of historical value, they endeavor to acquire it for the museum. Shotguns, since you

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ask, are obtained primarily from the Southern states, where they are passed on as legacies. They sometimes figure prominently in local disputes, called—ah, feuds, I believe."

"Do private collectors get them the same way?"

"That would be a reasonable assumption, yes."

"Ah, ha," said Stone.

"I don't get it," said Weems.

"Never mind, Roger. Just pack a bag—we're going on a little trip."

"Where to?"

"South."

The long and skinny hounds were still scratching and casting nasty aspersions in hound language when Stone and Weems arrived at the end of a rutted farm road somewhere in Georgia. The two men had been directed to this homestead by the owner of a gun shop in a nearby hamlet, who had recently sold a new twelve-gauge to the resident sharecropper. This was their fifth stop, the first four sharecroppers having proved to be exceedingly uncooperative, in that none had recognized the revamped Parker Knockabout.

"You ever seen this gun before, mister?" asked Weems hopefully, extending the gun to the lank personage who peered at him through a crack in the warped door.

After a short silence growling voice replied, "I se part of it afore. Them barr and forepiece there is off old scattergun." Weems hear sort of liquid blurting sound the sharecropper turned head and spat tobacco ju somewhere inside the house.

"How can you tell?"

" 'Cause them there barr is steel and that there forepi is made out of walnut. Any f knows that. I got a new c ain't nearly as good. I wi now I hadn't sold 'er to tl aunty-kews feller."

The confused expressi came back to Weems's fa "You sold your gun to y aunt?"

The man turned his he again. Blurt. He turned ba wiping his whiskery mouth w the back of his hand. With other he fished around in overalls and handed Weem dirty oblong of cardboard.

Reading over Weem shoulder, Stone made out bold Spencerian script on card: *Frederick Wenton, A tiques,* and a Midwest C address. Jubilantly the det tives leaped from the sagg porch and trotted toward th car. Halfway there, a snarl feminine voice hailed them.

"Hey, when you see tl feller, ask him kin I have butter churn back, will ye?"

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A story that could be called "A Crime of Our Time"... The crime is murder, but the question arises: Was the crime committed by Juan Diego, or was it committed against him? Judge for yourself...

THE HOT TAMALES MURDER CASE

by J. F. PEIRCE

There was a lull in the trial. The prosecuting and defense attorneys had approached the bench and were discussing a point of law with the judge, speaking in low tones that reached me as a murmur. From my vantage point in the jury box I took the opportunity to study the defendant.

His name was Juan Diego. He was a Chicano, a Mexican-American, and from his appearance more Indian than Spanish. He sat, as he had throughout the trial, with his hands folded, with a quiet dignity that verged on the Stoic. He was a small, tightly knit man and wore an old-fashioned walrus mustache that accented the downcast expression of his mahogany face and his sad brown eyes.

He was dressed in an expensive banker's-gray suit, a reminder of the days when he was reputed to have been a multimillionaire. It was hard to believe that this soft-spoken, mild-mannered little man had once been a business tycoon. It was even harder to believe that he was now a murderer, that he had killed a man apparently without provocation, a man he had known less than fifteen minutes.

I remembered the first day of the trial, as he stood with his lawyer facing the judge, while the charge was read against him.

"How does the defendant plead?" the judge asked. "Guilty or not guilty?"

Juan Diego's lawyer answered for him. "Not guilty, your Honor, by reason of temporary insanity."

There was no sign of insanity in Juan Diego's eyes or face now. Certainly he was aware of everything that was going on. He had been an excellent, an intelligent witness in his own behalf, speaking simply, directly, answering all questions in a straightforward manner.

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I tried to weave a pattern from the threads of testimony that had been given by the various witnesses.

The facts of the case were unchallenged. Juan Diego had killed a man. No one denied that, least of all Juan Diego. "I regret it very much," he said, "as Christ is my witness. May God forgive me. I cannot forgive myself."

The man, a stranger, had entered Juan Diego's small, cluttered, home-owned grocery store located beneath his family living quarters in the Mexican section of the town. The man had purchased a pack of cigarettes, eaten a homemade hot tamale, and exchanged a few words with Juan Diego, commenting on the tamale's excellent quality; whereupon Juan Diego had pulled a revolver from under the counter, where he kept it as "insurance against a possible holdup," and shot the man dead.

"He kept pulling the trigger even after the gun was emptied," a customer who had witnessed the murder testified. "It kept going click, click, click until I took it away from him."

Though I pride myself on my imagination, I could not "see" this humble little man standing over a bloody corpse, mechanically pulling the trigger of the pearl-handled revolver that had been introduced into evidence as "Exhibit A."

According to the testimony read into the record, the events of that fateful fifteen minutes had had their beginning some two years earlier. They had begun in a strangely similar fashion. A newspaper reporter named Eric Scott, unknown to Juan Diego, had stopped at this same little grocery. Scott had been covering a fire in the neighborhood, had phoned in his story, then stopped off at Juan Diego's, on impulse, to pick up a six-pack of beer to take home.

Juan Diego was eating his evening meal at the checkout counter when the reporter came in and sniffed the air in appreciation of the tantalizing odor of hot tamales that pervaded the store.

Instinctively Juan Diego held out a plate with half a dozen steaming tamales on it for Scott to take one. The reporter, once he finished eating, licked his fingers to capture the last lingering taste of the tamale.

"Homemade," he said.

Though it was a statement, not a question, Juan Diego nodded. "I make them from a recipe that has come down in my family from my great-great-grandmother. The secret is in adding a kiss of pork to

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sweeten the beef and grinding the meal just so, to give them the right texture."

"You have them for sale?" the reporter asked.

Again Juan Diego nodded, then led the way to a refrigerator at the back, where big fat tamales, wrapped in real corn shucks, were stacked in neat rows.

"I bought two dozen," Scott testified, "and in the excitement of finding real homemade tamales I forgot my original reason for stopping. I was halfway home before I remembered the beer. I shrugged and said aloud, 'What the hell, I can buy beer anywhere, anytime, but homemade tamales—' "

Two days later a feature story under Scott's byline appeared in the paper, a nostalgic piece about his childhood, the trips he had made downtown to buy homemade tamales from the old Mexican who sold them from a 10-gallon lard can on the bank corner. It was a story about a bygone America, and he had put his heart, his soul, and his taste buds into it. He ended it with "I bring you tidings of great joy. This day, in a little grocery store in the Mexican section of our fair city, hot tamales—real honest-to-goodness homemade hot tamales swaddled in corn shucks—are being made and sold. Enjoy! Enjoy!"

Legend has it that if you build a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door. This may or may not be true. It *is* true if you make a better tamale. Juan Diego was living proof of that. The world beat a path to *his* door.

The very night that Scott's story appeared in the paper a dozen people roused Juan Diego out of his living quarters above the store and pleaded with him to open up and sell them tamales. Each time, though with increasing reluctance, Juan Diego complied.

All the next day Anglos appeared at the grocery, trying to recapture a taste of their past, seeking the hot tamales that they remembered from their youth, hot tamales steaming with flavor—not the paper-wrapped canned variety that they bought infrequently at their neighborhood supermarkets.

Those who were fortunate enough to get some found them to be even better than the tamales of their memories. But most who came were turned away in disappointment, as Juan Diego's small supply was quickly depleted. But he took their orders and promised to fill them as soon as possible: "*Si.* Perhaps *manana.* Who can say?"

At first Juan Diego was

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happy over the sudden increase in his business. It came at a good time. Family illnesses had caused his bills to mount up. He needed the money. And he and his wife, Consuelo, worked diligently making the tamales with loving care to fill the orders. The finest ingredients were used, the proportions measured precisely, the meal ground to the mystical moment of perfection, the tamales rolled, wrapped in corn shucks, and tied just so before being put in the cooker to steam. After all, it was only a temporary thing surely, he thought. He and Consuelo should make the most of this opportunity while they could. The lost sleep could be made up later—when business was slow or when there was no business.

But business did not slow. It increased. Word of mouth proved once again to be the best form of advertising. People came from all over the city to the store, as to a shrine, and Juan Diego pressed first his daughter María, next his son José, and then his married daughters and their families into making tamales to supply the ever-increasing demand.

Fortunately, he had a large supply of shucks on hand, and it was the right time of the year to get more. He sent neighborhood boys out to the farms for miles around to gather corn shucks. And when these proved not to be enough, he wrote to his brothers in the Midwest to ship him more.

Soon people from neighboring towns found their way to Juan Diego's grocery. They could be seen cruising slowly along the street searching for the tiny sign that proclaimed: Juan Diego—Grocery & Meat Market.

The other merchants began to complain. They were jealous of Juan Diego, and their customers were having a difficult time finding places to park.

Juan Diego's regular customers also complained. They resented having to wait for service and being shoved aside by pushy Anglos.

Before long the tail began to wag the dog. The tamales became Juan Diego's main source of income, and after a time, reluctantly, he closed his grocery business and turned the store into a tamale factory.

Then, at the suggestion of one of his customers, a banker named Hunter, he began marketing his tamales through other stores throughout the city. " 'After all,' I told him," Hunter testified, " 'the majority of your customers are Anglos who live in other parts of the city. It would be a convenience

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or them. If they could buy amales more easily, they'd buy hem more often.' "

Shortly thereafter Hunter nade a gift of two dozen of uan Diego's tamales to the hen President of the United tates. And two weeks later an rder for fifty dozen came from he White House, where they vere served at a state dinner.

As a result Juan Diego's amales were written up in all f the media, but the sight of he President on a TV news eport, eating one of Juan Diego's tamales with obvious usto, was the ultimate adver- isement.

The next day a national grocery chain ordered five housand dozen tamales.

"Juan Diego was over- whelmed," Hunter went on in is testimony. "He wanted to efuse the order, but I ersuaded him to take it and ecured a warehouse for him on which our bank happened to ave a lien. I also suggested that e hire some of the city's ard-core unemployed to help make the tamales, which he did, putting the members of his family to supervising them.

"Of course there was a slight loss of quality in the mass-produced tamales. They weren't made so precisely or with the same loving care as when Juan Diego and Consuelo themselves made them. But to people who had never eaten the originals they seemed like heaven—at least, no one complained."

The five thousand dozen tamales were sold out the same day they were put in the chain stores' refrigerated display cases. The next order was for ten thousand dozen, and then the chain contracted for one-hundred-thousand-dozen lots.

"I was able to find another warehouse for him," Hunter continued, "and the State Employment Agency produced hundreds more employables."

At the behest of the City Council, the mayor proclaimed "Juan Diego Appreciation Day" for his "having hired so many of the city's unemployed, for his having brought honor to the city, and for his et cetera, et cetera, et cetera." But the proclamation made no mention of Juan Diego's ballooning taxes.

Juan Diego and his family began to be recognized in other ways. They were invited out more and more often by members of both the Anglo and Chicano communities: by real- tors, car salesmen, furniture store owners; by anyone and everyone who had something to sell. And María began to date an Anglo boy whom she had mooned over in school for years but who never before had

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appeared to know she existed.

"The business continued to grow dramatically," Hunter replied in response to a question. "Then it peaked, suffered a slight decline, but quickly leveled off, stabilizing on a high plateau of production."

Though at first distrustful of his success—not believing it could happen to someone like him, let alone to him—Juan Diego slowly began to believe in his prosperity and to enjoy it. At the urging of his family and his many new friends he began to spend money—he bought a new home "in a better section of the city," he bought cars, jewelry, clothes, anything and everything his family wanted. All his new friends turned out to be very helpful, aiding him in getting "some really good buys." After all, "the best only *seems* to cost more—it has a longer life, needs less repairs, stays in style longer."

María had a coming-out party," Scott recalled. "It was attended by most of the prominent business and social leaders of the community. As a climax to the party Juan Diego announced María's engagement. The wedding was set for the following summer. And from all reports it was to be *the* social event of the season."

Everything was turning up roses. Nothing Juan Diego tri could go wrong.

Then everything did.

"Without Juan Diego kno ing it," Scott testified, "uni organizers had infiltrated t tamale factories, organizing t workers, persuading them th Juan Diego was a vampi getting fat on their blood, th he owed them more, that th owed him less. Blinded l greed, envy, jealousy, tl workers believed it, forgot th they had been jobless wh Diego had hired them, that the had been hungry when he ha fed them, that he had enable them to pay the rent, put down payment on a car or T set. They forgot that they ha been on welfare and he ha given them dignity and pride.

When the union represent tives came to Juan Diego wit their demands Juan Dieg exloded. "Not on the surface, he testified, "but inside. Ou wardly I remained calm, polite The demands were not impossible. If the workers had come t me directly, if one of them ha said, 'Juan, you have so much we have so little,' I might hav agreed to their *requests* withou argument. But not to thei *demands* made through a thir party. My own pride, my ow dignity were hurt. So refused."

The workers went on strike.

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"Even then," Juan Diego admitted, "it might not have been too late for a meeting of the minds. But José reminded me that there was a sizable inventory of tamales in the huge walk-in freezers. It would be good to let the workers miss a paycheck or two. Let them remember what I had done for them. Besides, Mr. Hunter happened to know where I could get some tamale machines quickly.

" 'You don't even have to buy them,' he told me. 'You can rent them for as long as you like. And if you do decide to buy them the rent will apply to the purchase price.'

" 'No,' I said. 'I'll rent them, but only for the duration of the strike,' and Mr. Hunter agreed."

The machines were duly installed. The strike floundered, almost collapsed. The machines were doing the workmen's job. The tamales were not so fat as before, the quality not quite so good, but the strike resulted in only a small decline in production and sales.

Juan Diego waited for his friends among the workers to come to talk to him. They in turn waited for him to approach them.

"Some of the strikers grew angry and impatient," Scott testified. "A fire broke out at one of the factories, three of Juan Diego's refrigerated trucks were run off the road and overturned, a bomb explosion shattered the windows and one wall of his new home, José was waylaid and beaten. There were bitter words, recriminations, open threats."

Juan Diego's heart hardened, his resistance stiffened.

"The supply of corn shucks began to dwindle," Hunter testified, "and I persuaded Juan to substitute paper. 'After all,' I told him, 'shucks don't work as well in the machines—they require too much preparation; and they're much too expensive. Besides, it's the meat and meal, not the shucks, that give the flavor."

"I knew that was not completely true," Juan Diego conceded. "The steam penetrates the shucks more easily than it does paper. Still the question was—how do you say?—academic. No shucks were available.

"The paper wrapping caused another slight loss of quality, another small loss in sales; but it speeded up production, increased inventories."

The sabotage continued.

"I had to hire guards to protect my factories, my drivers, my family. Once there was an exchange of gunfire. One of the strikers was killed, one of the guards wounded.

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"Mr. Hunter suggested setting up factories in other parts of the country, closer to the chief markets—shutting down locally until things cooled off.

" 'If you think it best,' I said.

" 'The thing to do is to incorporate,' Mr. Hunter said, 'and build new plants from scratch, factories specially designed to produce nothing but tamales.'

"I shook my head. 'Where could *I* get so much money?' I asked.

" 'Leave it to me,' he answered. 'We'll get it from the government. Show the government boys that you can give jobs to thousands of hard-core unemployed, and they'll gladly lend you the money, and at a low rate of interest.' "

Sites were selected, factories were designed, machinery was purchased, loans were floated. Overnight Juan Diego became a multimillion-dollar corporation, a financial power.

"When I suggested putting the tamales in cans, the better to store and protect them, since his inventories were getting out of hand," Hunter went on, "Juan hardly protested. Of course he had been renting the freezer space for storage, and the cost had been prohibitive. That may have helped to reconcile him to the decision."

The truth was that the heart had gone out of Juan Diego. Perhaps as a result of "the hatred I saw in the eyes of pickets who had been, not just my workers, but my friends; they stood silently as I drove through the picket lines in my big limousine, and I could feel their hatred like a cold lump in my stomach."

Scott's testimony was often interpretative. "Because of the strike," he explained, "Maria's wedding was quietly postponed—perhaps for fear of what some of the more fanatical strikers might do at the sight of so much pomp and luxury. By then most of them were back on relief—their cars and washing machines and TV sets repossessed for failure to make payments.

"At about the same time the bottom dropped out of everything. When the canned tamales hit the market they sold almost as well as they had in frozen form and in bulk. But people bought them only once, discovering that somewhere along the line the product had changed. The ingredients had lost some of their quality, some of their unique flavor. Even the texture was no longer the same. Now they were not any better than the other canned brands on the market. And when the housewives of America went

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back to the supermarkets to buy tamales, they also went back to their old brands."

Scott hesitated, then looked away from Juan Diego before he continued: "I don't know when Juan Diego learned that his son had sold him out along with the rest. At first Juan had mixed the ingredients for the hot tamales in secret. Then, when the business expanded, he had José help him. Finally, in the press of setting up the new factories, he turned the complete responsibility for mixing the ingredients over to his son.

"José didn't see the need to buy expensive cuts of meat. He didn't see the need to add pork or grind the meal as fine. So he substituted inferior meat and meal, then had the suppliers bill his father as before, with José pocketing the kickbacks."

Much of Hunter's testimony had to be pried from him by persistent questioning. Only when the answers reflected credit to him did he speak freely. "The factories continued under construction. The machines that Juan Diego had ordered piled up in warehouses. The inventories grew and grew until there was no more space to store them. Then everything ground to a halt. Reluctantly I advised bankruptcy."

Scott talked as if he were writing a news story. "When it was over and done," he reported, "Juan Diego lay buried under his paper empire. All that he possessed in his own name was his original little grocery store, which out of sentiment he had never sold and which still remained in the records as his home, instead of the half-million-dollar estate in the exclusive country-club district to which he had moved his family at the height of his success."

Juan Diego's own testimony was painfully honest. "Without ever quite knowing how or why it had happened," he said, "I found myself back in the grocery business—at the same old stand, as they say, but not as before. Too many things had changed. My friends, both old and new, had turned against me. I was a laughing-stock throughout the city. My son had disappeared with the funds he had skimmed from the dregs of my failure. But the wound that ached most of all was the one caused by the death of my daughter.

"The collapse of my business brought the collapse of her hopes for marriage. Her young man broke their engagement and María's heart. And almost immediately he married another girl.

"The day her young man married I found her 'sleeping'

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and could not wake her.

"After that I went through the motions of running the grocery store. And in time the pain lost a little of its bitter sting. People began to forget. Old customers returned, drifting back gradually in ones and twos. After all, my grocery *was* convenient and my prices *were* right.

"Then one day Consuelo suggested that we make some tamales. Not to sell, you understand, but just for ourselves. I shrugged and said, '*Si.* Why not?'

"Late in the afternoon, several days later, a young man entered the grocery and bought a pack of cigarettes. I had never seen him before.

"I was eating my supper at the checkout counter as usual at that time of day and the young man sniffed the air appreciatively.

" 'Hot tamales!' he said. 'Homemade hot tamales!'

"Instinctively I held out the plate with the tamales on it and he took one, wolfed it down, and licked his fingers. Then the thought evidently hit him.

" 'You know what?' he said. 'A fellow could make a mint of money with tamales like these. I bet they'd be almost as good if *we* mass-produced them. The main thing is to get them before the public—let them know what we've got to sell.

" 'I've got a friend, a newspaperman. I'll get him to write a story saying, "There's this little Chicano down in Mexican Town who makes the best damned tamales ev—" '

"Something went *click* in my mind. I knew what I was doing—but couldn't stop myself. It was as if I was standing off watching myself from one side, as if my hand acted independent of my brain. I saw it reach out, take the revolver from under the counter, and begin shooting.

"I'd be pulling the trigger still if someone hadn't taken the gun from me."

As he spoke, I felt *my* finger tighten, and I knew I could cast my ballot only one way.

EDITORIAL QUESTION: If you were a member of the jury, what would your vote be? Guilty? Juan Diego committed murder—that is admitted. But was he *really* guilty?

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continuing the *NEW* series of police procedurals by

LAWRENCE TREAT

Lieutenant Decker, Chief of Homicide, was out of town when this big case broke. Commissioner Sturm himself took charge, and the way he played it the case turned into a lulu—as if it wasn't a lulu to begin with! And the way Inspector Mitch Taylor played it, cool and easy, it stayed a lulu. A policeman's lot and all that . . . oh, yeah?

K AS IN KIDNAPING

by LAWRENCE TREAT

It seemed that somebody had finally caught on that Lieutenant Bill Decker, Chief of Homicide, knew his stuff. So the French government, or maybe it was the Mayor of Paris, invited the Lieutenant over to Europe so he could give the French the lowdown on how to stop crime. Naturally, this thing back here broke while the Lieutenant wasn't around. And right in the Thanksgiving weekend, besides.

Inspector Mitch Taylor heard about it on his way to work, from this bus driver. Mitch didn't know the guy's name, except Mitch rode his bus pretty often and knew that face. A real sourpuss it was, too.

The driver knew Mitch all right on account Mitch had to show his identification to get a free ride. Usually this sourpuss had something personal to yak about, like he had a sore back or some mechanic hadn't greased the steering arm right or else he was behind schedule after some bohunk had sideswiped him or something.

This morning he looked up at Mitch like he'd never seen him before and he waited for Mitch to take his identification out of his pocket, instead of saying okay like the rest of the drivers did. Then this sourpuss raced his motor for a few

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seconds, just in case there happened to be some clean air around. After he was pretty sure he'd done his bit for pollution he closed the door and started up. After that he spoke to Mitch.

"You heard about it?" he said.

"Heard what?"

"I thought maybe they would have told you. Besides, it was all over the radio."

"No kidding," Mitch said, without any real interest. He figured that if sourpuss was so anxious to tell him something it was bad news and it could wait. So he said, "No kidding." And he looked away. After that somebody dropped a dime on the floor, and what with everybody getting all excited looking for it and jamming up the entrance, the bus couldn't start again until the door was clear.

Next the driver had to make change, and then there was this small foreign car the bus driver wanted to cut off, on account maybe he didn't like foreign cars or else he was just showboating. Anyhow, Mitch had pretty much forgotten that the driver had this world-shaking news, and Mitch was thinking of the way Amy had looked when she'd said goodbye to him this morning. He was kind of far-off when this sourpuss brought him back.

"You ain't heard?" the driver said.

"Heard what?" Mitch said.

"They kidnaped the Governor's eight-year-old kid and they're going to kill him unless the Governor lets some convicts go."

"You serious?" Mitch said.

"It's like those political kidnapings. They got them a hostage, and I guess they mean business. Nobody told you?"

"Where'd this happen?" Mitch asked.

"Right here in town. Chances are you'll be working on the case, huh?"

"If they wanted me on it," Mitch said, "they'd have called me. A thing like this, they'll probably do what they're told to, until the kid's safe. After that maybe we'll get into the act."

"Guys that take an eight-year-old kid and want to kill him, they ought to get strung up. Except hanging's too good for them. They ought to suffer, see?"

After that the bus began to crowd up and Mitch didn't get much of a chance to talk to the driver. But at headquarters that was all you heard, and Mitch finally got the real facts.

It seemed that Governor Paraman was in town to make a Thanksgiving speech at the Center Hotel, and while him

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d the Mrs. were at the nquet where he was sounding f, somebody had walked into eir suite and asked Paulie did want to go downstairs and ten to his old man. Anyhow, at's what the kid told the evator operator on the way wn. He'd gotten off at the ezzanine, and from there it ust have been a cinch to ndle him out of the hotel and it him in the car. Around idnight the Governor had tten this call telling him to ok at the note in the kid's om.

That was the first anybody ew about it. Paulie's nurse ho slept in the same room ith him was snoring away and ey had trouble waking her. It emed she was drugged. Maybe ith a couple of plain ordinary eeping pills which she could ve taken on purpose, if she as working with the gang. therwise, they'd been slipped to the glass of ginger ale that e'd ordered around ten o'ock that evening, like she did ost nights.

The note told the Governor e'd better pardon a couple of nvicts named Skelly and amon. They were bank robers and they were in for 99 ears apiece, for a holdup in hich they'd killed a guard and olen a bank truck with a half illion dollars in it, cash. The dough had never been found.

The Homicide Squad had worked on the case and Mitch, like the rest of the gang, was pretty sure that somebody must have promised to get the pair of convicts out if they split the dough. Whoever it was they'd snatched Paulie Paraman and were holding him hostage until the Governor issued a pardon. The trouble was that if you backed them up against the wall they were liable to kill this kid just so he couldn't identify them. So the Governor and Commissioner Sturm were holding off a police hunt until the kid was safe. The orders, straight from the Governor, were for the Homicide Squad to stay out of this.

With that much settled, Mitch and Ed Balenky went across the street for a cup of coffee. Naturally they got to talking about the case.

"There's a question of law here," Balenky said. He'd read a book last year and he should have been a lawyer, the way he was always getting down to what was legal and what wasn't. "If they get a pardon it's under duress, so is it any good?"

"They'll be out of the country before anything like that comes up. Maybe Cuba."

"What would Cuba want them for?" Balenky said. "In Cuba they cotton up to politic-

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al refugees, but what would they want with a couple of hoods?"

"Anybody can use some first-rate bank robbers," Mitch said. "And these two, they're good. Remember the trouble we had hauling them in?"

"Five hundred grand," Balenky said. He took out his morning cigar, studied it, then stuck it in his mouth. He'd chew on it for a while before he lit up. After that you couldn't get near him, on account of the cheap cigars he smoked. Like Mitch had said once, tear gas is okay most of the time, but when it doesn't work they ought to send for Ed Balenky and his stogie.

Mitch watched the way Balenky admired the thing before biting into it. "Five hundred grand," Balenky said again. "What'll happen is, they'll hold this kid until Skelly and Damon pick up their dough and get out of the country. Then we'll find out where Paulie is, if he's still around."

"And after that," Mitch said, "we'll get the case. When all the leads are stale. When the kid's dead, maybe. I got a feeling they'll be scared to let him go."

"If the boss was around," Balenky said, "he'd start things rolling without anybody getting wised up. But this way, Jub up there in the lab hasn't even seen the note. He ought to be analyzing it, checking out the paper and stuff like that."

"That can wait," Mitch said. "The way this ought to be handled is, we ought to get a list of visitors that have seen these two guys up in the pen, because that's where the deal was made. You find out who saw them, and then you backtrack."

"You'll probably find out nobody saw them except their wives. Then you'll have to go to work on the wives."

"Damon has no wife," Mitch said. "We traced him through that girl friend of his. Jane Olney. Remember?"

"Yeah. I wonder where she is now." Balenky took the cigar out of his mouth and looked at it like he thought maybe he ought to light up. Which made it time for Mitch to go.

"Well," he said, "I ought to get started."

"You got something to do?" Balenky asked, like he didn't damn well know that Mitch, same as himself and the rest of the squad, was going out after Paulie.

"Just a summons to serve, over in the Second," Mitch said, without moving. He figured he'd stick around until Balenky took out a match. Only before he did, a uniformed cop came into the joint and spotted them.

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"You guys," he said. "They ant you over in the squad om. Orders from the Big heese himself."

The Big Cheese was Com- issioner Sturm, and so it oked like maybe something as up. And the gang thought , too. It seemed that while itch and Balenky were having at cup of coffee, the Govern- and the Mayor and the ommissioner had brought all e brass together in the lineup om, which was the biggest om there was, to give a uple of pep talks. They were ostly for the benefit of the ress, though, and about all at the three of them had anaged to get across was that aulie's life took top priority hey'd all used the same word, riority), and that everybody ould do his best in these ying hours. The only thing ey left out was what they ere going to do, and the gang ere on the Homicide Squad ad the feeling that whatever it as, they were elected.

It turned out even worse an that, though. Sturm came and buttered everybody up nd gave them the same alarkey he'd shoveled out to e press. He handed out some ictures of Paulie Paraman, so ou'd know him in case he appened to come walking own the street.

After that the Commissioner came up with a lulu. He said that in respect for the Govern- or's wishes they had to lay off the kidnapers, so the only way left to tackle this problem was to find the money. Once the $500,000 was located, there'd be no reason for releasing the robbers, and the kidnapers would have to let Paulie go. And since the boys on the Homicide Squad had worked on the original robbery, they were best equipped to find the dough.

Nobody said much. Two years ago they'd gone all out trying to locate that dough, and they'd struck out. Now they were supposed to go and dig it up before supper. And maybe the Commissioner really thought it was possible, or maybe he was just shooting off his mouth. Anyhow he ended up by saying the Homicide Squad was the pick of the department, they knew their business, so he wasn't going to tell them what to do.

Once he was out of their hair, the squad got busy doping out their program for the day. First off, they all of them knew they couldn't dream up that dough and they had no leads. Second, they knew they'd bet- ter get the hell out of here and make like they were onto something, and don't get caught hanging around any bars or

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lunch counters, either. And finally, forget the Commissioner's orders, just go out and try and locate Paulie; only remember one thing—his safety comes first.

This summons that Mitch had to serve, he kept it in his pocket, just in case. But what he really did was to check up on the places where the Olney dame used to hang out.

First, there was this beauty parlor. There, they told him she hadn't been around in the last couple of weeks, which was unusual. Next, he tried the garage where she'd kept her car. She still did and it was there all right and Mitch took down the license number, but she hadn't had the car out for the last few days.

After that he tried a couple of bars where she used to hang out, but he drew blanks. Then he remembered how she went big for Italian food and was a sucker for panatoni. According to Amy there were only two or three places where it was any good, and they were on Dante Street. But down there all Mitch found out was that she hadn't been around for a while.

In Mitch's mind it began to add up. She'd quit her routine because she was setting up something big, like the Paulie kidnaping. So where do you go now?

You don't know. You ju stick around wherever y happen to be. You keep yo eyes open and take it easy. A that was when Mitch saw t green panel truck withc markings.

Mostly, trucks like that a hired, only the license plate this one wasn't a rental numb The number was 483-386. Ma be that was why Mitch had th hunch, so he waited around li this was the big break he'd be counting on. And then a gi came out of the store with bag of groceries and got in the truck. And Mitch knew wh it was.

A man, by the name Hager. He was the school sup over on Lanier, and about year ago he'd been a witness some minor robbery in th school. Exactly—why he w driving a panel truck Mitc didn't know. But school w closed for the holiday an Hager had probably gone out t buy the groceries for his famil

In a panel truck? This Mitc had to look into, so when Hag started off, Mitch followed.

He was pretty sure Hag hadn't spotted him. There ar times when you don't war somebody to know you're tai ing him, and Mitch was good a that. But then there are othe times when you maybe want t flush somebody out and se

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what happens, and this was one of them. So Mitch lit off after the truck and pretty soon it slowed up on purpose to let him pass. Which meant the guy had noticed he was being followed. And you don't notice things like that unless you're doing something you shouldn't.

With no chance to find out where Hager was bound for, Mitch remembered that lookout spot on top of Sunset Heights. He kept going, took the winding road up the hill, stopped alongside the lookout, and stepped out. It was quite a view, and by a stroke of luck he spotted the green truck down on Lanier and going west toward the school. Which was empty, what with this being vacation time. There the truck turned into the parking lot where Mitch couldn't see it any more.

What he had now was, this super driving a panel truck and going over to his school. Which, the way Mitch figured it, had nothing to do with the kidnaping. It meant that this Hager was probably stealing school supplies and athletic equipment and stuff like that. He needed the truck for transportation, and it would take him a while to load up.

On account Mitch was supposed to be locating that pile of moolah, he couldn't admit he was chasing after some flyweight crook making off with a few bucks' worth of city property. Consequently Mitch didn't report back where he was and that he was leaving his car. In fact, knowing he might get into trouble for just that, he almost changed his mind and gave the whole thing up. Then he told himself he'd have a look-see and let it go at that. In a week or two when the theft was reported he'd know all about it. And the way he'd use what he knew, it was going to make him look good.

With that decided, he drove into the parking lot. The truck was there along with a black Rambler, license-plate number 12FX48. He jotted down the number on his pad and then went up to the side door of the school, the one off the parking lot, and gave it a try. It was open, so he went in. He felt kind of funny at first, it made him think back to when he'd been a kid. And he'd been no genius, either. Maybe once a month he got sent up to the principal's office and right now he had that feeling again, wanting out. Somehow, schools weren't for him. Never were and never would be.

He went downstairs anyhow, where there was a long hallway with lockers on both sides. They were tall lockers and he

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opened one of them, just for instance. It was empty, but with the click of the door he heard another locker open and this kid came running down the hall and trying to scoot past him, and nobody had to tell Mitch that the kid was Paulie.

Mitch made a grab and caught him and the kid said, "How did you find me?" And from the kid's look and from the way he had been trying to get past him, Mitch caught on that the kid had been playing hide-and-seek and thought Mitch was part of the game. But what hit Mitch was the kid's expression, sad-eyed and sort of appealing, like he'd been hurt inside and nobody'd ever loved him and so he was a sucker for anybody who did more than give him the time of day.

"Your dad and your mom sent me," Mitch said, taking the kid by the hand. "Come on."

Paulie sort of pulled back. "But I don't want to go," he said. "I got a new Mommy and Daddy and they're going to take me to the moon."

"Yeah?" Mitch said. "You going by rocket, or what?"

"I don't know how we're going, but I heard them say they're taking me to the moon."

"They were just kidding," Mitch said. "Look—I'm a cop and we can go chase robbers. Like to do that?"

"You're a real policeman?" Paulie said.

"You bet I am," Mitch answered. Which was the wrong thing to say, on account this guy with the low nasal voice spoke up from behind Mitch. "Okay, wise guy. Put your hands up, and don't turn around."

Mitch, feeling like he'd been caught off first, had sense enough to do what he was told. The kid's eyes got big, and he made a kind of oohing sound as he backed off.

The voice went on, "Beat it, kid. Go on back to Jane."

The kid moved off, out of Mitch's line of vision, and then footsteps plunked along the floor and got closer to Mitch. They stopped when something poked into his back, and a kind of stale breath hit him and made him want to jerk free.

"I got a gun on you," the voice said. "Try any little thing and you'll get it. I got itchy fingers, so be nice and quiet while I get that rod of yours."

"Take it," Mitch said. "I don't know who you are and I don't want to know. So take it and then tell me where you're leaving it, so I can pick it up later on. Okay?"

There was no answer. Mitch kept his head stiff and motionless, but his eyes strained to look down at the

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hand pulling his gun out of the holster. The fingers were stubby, the nails short and bitten down. The skin was yellow, like it was stained by nicotine. That was Mitch's last observation before something smashed down on his head and he went out cold.

When he came to, he was in a dark place somewheres and he was slouched on the floor. The smell of spices was strong, but at first he was too groggy to put things together. After a while, though, he began to chase the cobwebs out of his brain and he figured he was in a closet of some kind where they stored food. Which didn't explain the ticking.

It came from outside, and he stood up and felt for the doorknob and then turned it. When it didn't open the door he realized he was locked in. Which made the ticking sound real nasty, because they don't have tick-tock clocks in school. They have quiet electric ones.

So—a bomb? He didn't know, but the idea that maybe it was did a lot of things to him. It started up the adrenalin or something, and his mind began working pretty good and he checked stuff off. His holster was empty and his regular flashlight was gone, but the little one that clipped on like a pen was still in his inside pocket. He took the thing out and snapped it on, and he saw the spice jars and all the cans on the shelves. Then the beam reflected something metallic on the floor, and he bent down and spotted the screwdriver that somebody must have dropped. With that in his hand it was just a matter of wedging around where the lock was, and keeping at it. It took him five minutes to get free—five minutes of sweating it out, while he listened to the tick-tick.

When he stepped out he found himself in the pantry off the school kitchen. There was a suitcase in front of the closet and that was where the ticking came from. He was pretty sure, then, it was a bomb, and he went out quick, on account he knew nothing about bombs and wasn't going to start learning now.

Nobody had to tell him, either, what the kidnapers were up to. They'd been keeping Paulie here in the kitchen, which was where Hager had been headed with that food. He'd probably bought Jane Olney's favorite stuff. And while the school was a pretty good hideout for a couple of days or so, the kidnapers had to get out before Monday's classes.

They must have had the bomb ready, and Mitch admitted it was a pretty smart

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idea. Because, what with all the school violence going around, nobody was going to connect the explosion with the Paulie kidnaping. So the thing would go off and gum up any evidence that Paulie had been here or that Hager had any part in holding him. And besides, it would take care of Mitch. Because, while the investigation would show he'd been here, the theory would be that he'd been on the trail of the school bomber.

All that was clear enough to Mitch as he put distance between himself and the kitchen. He went along a corridor that made a turn, and there in front of him were the lockers and the place where he'd first run into Paulie. He kept going until he found the lavatory. After dousing himself with cold water he felt a little better, and his mug in the mirror looked like it always did—just an ordinary face, with dark eyes and stiff wiry hair. When he ran his hand through it he could feel a bump all right. but there was no blood. Which meant he wouldn't have a bunch of awkward questions to answer. He had a little time now to get his bearings and decide what to do next. Because the one thing he wasn't going to do was, he wasn't going to report in at headquarters.

There were a lot of reasons for that. First off, any cop who located Paulie and then got knocked cold and lost Paulie wasn't going to get any medals pinned on him. A guy like Commissioner Sturm, he'd have your gun and your badge for this. And talking about guns, what about Mitch's? It looked like he was going to be in for a lot of tall explaining.

Next, along with the rest of the Homicide Squad, Mitch was under orders to lay off the kidnapers and concentrate on locating the dough. If he'd walked into headquarters with Paulie in tow, that would have been okay. But to admit he'd been after somebody on a minor larceny charge and had run into the kidnapers by mistake, with the result that now they were warned off—that was out. Definitely. If Mitch knew what was good for him.

It would have been different if the Lieutenant had been around. With him here, Mitch would have come out straight with what had happened. Not exactly straight, maybe, but he'd have told the important part, angling it a little here and there so's to take care of the business of his losing his gun. After that the Lieutenant would have the responsibility of handling the information. But on the dough they paid Mitch

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ıe wasn't going to make any ıigh-level decisions. So where ıas he?

The answer to that was easy. He was the guy with the red-hot lope, and it was up to him to ıand it in to headquarters as ıoon as he could. Which meant ı phone call. And while there ıas a chance that the bomb ıight go off any minute, there ɔught to be a phone around ıere somewhères that wasn't ɔo near the kitchen.

The best place to find a ɔhone was in the principal's ɔffice, which ought to be near ıe main entrance. Leastways it ılways had been when Mitch ıas in school, and he was glad ɔ find out that much, at least, ıadn't changed.

He made his call to the lespatcher, and in a disguised ɔice, too. What Mitch said was, 'A man and a woman are lriving a green panel truck, ɔlate number 483-386. They ɡot Paulie with them. And you ɔetter look out for a black Rambler, plate number L2FX48." He hung up fast. While his information might not ɔe strictly accurate all the way, t gave the main facts.

Out in the parking lot the Rambler and the panel truck ıere gone, of course. His own ɔar was there, though, locked ıp like it was supposed to be. And that might have been something to cheer about, except when he stuck his hand in his pocket, where was the key, huh?

Still, he'd opened plenty of locked cars and was more or less an expert at it. All you had to do was force open the front part of the window, reach in, and unlock the door. After that you located the ignition wires and twisted them together, and you were off.

Mitch was maybe a couple of blocks from the school when he heard the explosion. It sounded like a pretty big one, but he had other worries, namely, what was he going to do about that gun of his? On account when you lose your gun, you got to come up with some pretty good explanations if you don't want to be strung up on the meat hook. So—shut up about it and go around without a gun? Or admit he'd lost his? And if so, what kind of a story could he cook up?

After about fifteen or twenty minutes it looked like his mind was frozen up for the day, so he just stopped thinking about it. Right after that he spotted the toy store.

He parked in front of it, went in, and saw all the imitation automatic rifles and revolvers and mini-size cannons and bazookas and stuff like that, and he thought of the

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holdups that had been staged with toy guns. So why wouldn't the trick work for him?

"I got a kid," he said to the clerk, "that wants a gun like a cop's. You know how kids are. So let's see what you got in the way of toy revolvers."

He was lucky and found an imitation .38 Police Positive. He let the clerk wrap it up and then he went back to his car and took the gun out of the package and stuck it in his holster. He felt a little silly going around with a toy gun, but at least he was covered for a while, until he dreamed up something that would really get him off the hook.

He was back in the police garage a little before 3:00 and got hold of Artie. Artie was this mechanic Mitch had done a bunch of favors for over the years, and Artie had done a few for him. So all he had to do was tell Artie to fix up the window and get him a new key, and shut up about it.

Mitch hung around the garage while Artie went to work. They had a radio going here, some kind of rock music, but Mitch didn't particularly listen until they cut off the music to make an announcement.

"We interrupt this program," the announcer said, "to give you the following special bulletin: A green panel tru believed to be the one in wh Paulie Paraman was abduct was apprehended by the po after a short chase. The t occupants were heavily arm One of them has been identif as John Hager, superintend of Davis High School, wher bomb was exploded ear today, and the other as William Spring. It is not known if there is any conn tion between the bombing a the abduction, and thus there is no trace of Paulie. K tuned to this station for furt news."

After that the rock st started up again. Mitch wall over to Artie, who was alm finished with the job.

"Well," Mitch said, "what you know, huh?"

Artie shook his head. hope they didn't do anything the kid."

"Yeah," Mitch said.

He figured maybe it w time to show up in the squ room. Because, the way Mi saw it, with Hager and t other guy caught, and the ot guy was probably the one t conked Mitch, it looked l Jane Olney had gone somewheres with the kid. If s had and if she was the only o of the gang still loose, she ou to know she couldn't carry t scheme through all by herself

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On the other hand what if they'd already killed the kid? Or if there were some more members of the gang and they were getting desperate? Or if Jane had the kid with her and didn't know what had happened or what to do and so she panicked. Then what?

Mitch couldn't remember when he'd been so jittery. But the more he thought things over, the more he told himself he'd get nowheres and help nobody by going up to the Commissioner and spouting out his information. Besides, with the boss away, Sturm was short-circuiting the Homicide Squad and trying to cop all the credit for himself. And right now he was interrogating Hager and this other guy, William Spring.

About the only guy Mitch could trust for advice was Jub Freeman, up in the lab. Jub, who was about as close to Mitch as anybody around, had the job of working up the technical end of stuff, like ballistics and fingerprints and moulage casts of anything that looked like it might get to be evidence.

When Mitch went up to the lab, Jub was working and he just turned his head around for a couple of seconds to see who it was.

"Hi," Mitch said. "I don't want to get in your way, but I thought maybe I could help a little."

Jub, peering through a microscope, said, "You?" Then he gave a kind of chuckle. "No, thanks," he said. "Got to do this myself. Going to take me all night, too. So much stuff here—"

His voice trailed off. Mitch, frowning, told himself this wasn't exactly the time to bother Jub with outside problems. Still, Mitch hung around for a couple of minutes to make his visit look casual and kind of wandered over to the counter where the stuff from the panel truck had been placed, all properly tagged. He noticed the bag of groceries that Hager had picked up on Dante Street earlier in the day. Next to it were the weapons—a small .22, maybe the Olney dame's, and a big .45, and a .38. The .38 was Mitch's.

He took the toy gun out of his holster, put it down on the counter, and picked up his own gun. Then he quickly switched the identifying tag over to the toy gun and lowered it to the counter. Jub hadn't even turned around.

"Quite a haul," Mitch commented. His voice grated, and he had to clear his throat. "What about the truck?" he asked, trying to stay casual.

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"Stolen." Jub still didn't turn around. "What did you expect? The owner didn't even know it was gone."

"Yeah," Mitch said, beginning to feel relaxed. "You'd think a guy would know when his own truck was missing."

"He had it stored in a garage for the winter. He only uses the truck summers, for his country place. Up at Moon Lodge."

Mitch crossed the room. "Where?" he said. "Where's Moon Lodge?"

"Upstate somewheres. Why?"

"Nothing," Mitch said. "Nothing at all. Except—"

Jub swung around. "Something wrong, Mitch?"

Mitch shook his head. "Been a hell of a day," he said. "Well, I'll be seeing you."

He took the stairs down and stopped on the halfway landing. He wasn't exactly shaky, but he just felt he'd better hold up there for a couple of seconds and think things through.

He was off the hook on the gun. There might be a few questions asked about that toy gun and Jub might guess Mitch had made the switch, but it would be no skin off Jub's nose. And he'd keep his suspicions to himself. But what really shook Mitch up was knowing where Paulie was. The kid had said they were taking him to the moon. Sure- Moon Lodge. It all check Hager and Spring had someh found out about Moon Loc and how nobody was there winter and how even the tru could be picked up. So t thing was, Mitch had to hand his news without letting on w he was.

It had worked before and would work again, so Mit went across the street to wh he could use the pay phone. he stepped into the place Balenky called over from table.

"Hey, Mitch, how abc having one with me?" And pointed to the mug of beer front of him.

Mitch nodded. "Sure," said. "Be right with you. Onl got to call the wife first and t her I'll be a little late."

He stuck his dime in the sl got the despatcher and spoke the same disguised voice h used before. "You know w this is," he said. "Paulie's at t Moon Lodge place, upsta With Jane Olney. She probal took him there in the bla Rambler, so get moving." Th he stepped out of the boc and went over to sit down a wait it out with Ed Balenky.

They hashed over the ca pretty much the way they done this morning, and Balen had plenty of ideas, most

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vhich were cockeyed. Mitch ust listened and didn't say nuch, on account when you tart talking to Ed he's liable to atch on to what you don't vant him to.

Mitch was on his second beer nd still listening when Jim Bankhart came in, a broad grin pread all over his face.

"Heard the news?" he said. "They found Paulie. State police got a tip and they went o some place upstate. Moon Lodge, they called it. It was empty except for the Olney lame and the kid. She was waiting there for Hager and Spring, only instead of them the police showed up."

"Funny business," Balenky said. "That's the second tipoff came in. Sounds too pat. It's a cover-up for something. If you ask me, I don't believe there were any phone calls. Sounds as if Sturm's pulling a fast one."

Mitch made like he was giving the matter deep thought before he came up with a comment. And even then he sort of hedged.

"Yeah," he said. "Maybe you got something there."

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FROM A LAWYER'S ARCHIVES

a *NEW* legal-detective story by

MICHAEL GILBERT

first magazine publication in the United States

Here is the second in Michael Gilbert's new series of legal-detective stories — another strange and fascinating mystery hidden this time in a deed wallet in the files of Messrs. Preece and Sexton, lawyers for a certain Colonel Ambrose Spender who had once distinguished himself for daring Intelligence work . . . What deep dark secrets are buried in the archives of an established law firm? . . .

ACCESSORIES AFTER THE FACT

by MICHAEL GILBERT

Malcolm Preece settled himself in the far corner seat of the last first-class carriage on the 7:50 train from Woking to London. The seat was one in which long usage had given him almost prescriptive rights. After blowing his nose and wishing his regular traveling companion, Mr. Satterthwaite, good morning, he turned to the obituary columns of *The Times*.

A familiar name caught his eye.

"I see that one of our local celebrities has gone," he said.

"Not Miss Pringle?" said Mr. Satterthwaite. "Dear, dear, and we all thought she'd make her century."

"No. Not Miss Pringle. Colonel Spender."

"I heard he'd been ill. He was a tough old boy. We thought he might have got over it."

"Not this time," said Mr. Preece and handed his copy of

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e paper to Mr. Satterthwaite, ross a small woman who had esumed to occupy the seat tween them. Mr. Preece spected that she didn't have a st-class ticket.

"Spender, Ambrose. After a inful illness gallantly borne. ied in Guildford Infirmary. o flowers. Donations to the nperial War Graves Commis-on."

"An eccentric character, by l accounts," said Mr. Satterth-aite.

"He was one of my clients," id Mr. Preece, with a note of proof.

"Then I withdraw the mark. If he was a client of the rm of Preece and Sexton he ust have been a man of the ighest repute."

"He had had a rather odd reer," conceded Mr. Preece. He called himself Colonel pender. I had been told, in rict confidence" — and here r. Preece glared at the small oman as if daring her to peat something overheard, in nfidence, in a first-class ilway carriage — "that he was warded this rank, and a umber of English and foreign ecorations, too, for daring ntelligence work behind the nemy lines."

"I only knew him vaguely," id Mr. Satterthwaite. "He had ne of those houses in Knaphill Woods, didn't he? Rather nice houses, but a bit isolated."

"Not exactly isolated. A bit remote."

"Wasn't that where they found that woman — what was her name?"

"Mrs. Slaney."

"Mrs. Slaney. That's right. She'd been knocked on the head. But not robbed or — er — assaulted. The police never solved it."

"It was a complete mystery," said Mr. Preece, "and it looks as if it will stay that way. It's nearly two years since it happened. The trail must be very cold by now."

The small woman, who was tired of being ignored, said defiantly, "My aunt's cook, who was walking out with one of the policemen, told her that the case was *not* closed. They had a clue. And he told her what it was — in confidence, of course."

"Oh?" said Mr. Preece.

"Really?" said Mr. Satterthwaite.

Both gentlemen then retired behind their newspapers and did not utter another word until the train reached Waterloo Station.

If a certain disparity in temperament produces the happiest marriages, the same might be said of professional partner-

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ships. Certainly the legal practice of Messrs. Preece and Sexton, though not long established in Bedford Row, managed to get along well enough, although it would have been hard to find two men of more widely different characters than Mr. Preece and Mr. Sexton.

Malcolm Preece was correct in dress and deportment, conservative in outlook, and extremely conscientious in his work. He was normally the first to arrive at the office, and often the last to leave. David Sexton was casual, empirical, and occasionally, in Mr. Preece's view, unnecessarily flippant. However, it was a combination of talents which seemed to work. As Mr. Preece sometimes remarked to his clients, "If there's a theoretical solution, I can usually work it out. If I'm stuck, David Sexton can often find a practical answer."

While they were opening and sorting out the mail, a ritual which they carried out together every morning, Mr. Preece told him of the death of Colonel Spender.

"Yes," said Sexton, "I saw it in *The Times*. I thought I'd get his will up so that we could have a look at it. I believe you're his sole executor, aren't you?"

"I think I am," said Mr. Preece.

He was untwisting the st which held down the flap of deed wallet. The first th which slid out as he opene were a long legal-look envelope, then a smaller sq one.

"That's the will," said Preece. "What's the other o I don't seem to remember

Sexton picked it up. On neatly typed, were the wo *To be placed with my Will, opened only at my death*— lowed by the initials, typed, *A.S.*

"It always seems curious me," said Mr. Preece, "t people will employ a solic to make a perfectly sound for them, and then clutte round—hand me that pa knife, would you?—with called 'letters of instructi which are legally ineffec and, in any event, so wool drawn that they can't be carr out — good heavens!"

"What is it?"

"I can't believe it. It's possible!"

"*What* isn't possible?"

"Colonel Spender — no

Sexton grabbed the sin sheet of notepaper from partner's hand, read it, whistled.

"Well," he said, "the devil. I knew he was a qu cuss, but this beats everythin

"Do you think it's true?

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't be, can it? It's some sort oke."

'If you think it's a joke," Sexton, "the most sensible ıg would be to tear it up and get about it."

'Good heavens, we can't do :. If the Colonel took the ıble to leave it with his will, must have meant me to act it. As his executor, I've no ice."

'Then you'll have to show it the police. They'll have to ke their minds up what y're going to do about it. ne to think of it, there's not ch they *can* do now, is e?"

'I suppose not," said Mr. ece thoughtfully. "No."

The typewritten slip was rt and to the point. It said: ieresa Slaney was a poison- bitch. I knocked her on the d and have few regrets. I'm ing this note with my Will ase some other poor devil suspected of it. She had ıty of enemies, God knows. dentally, if the police don't eve me, ask them whether ıot they found an artificial kin glove near the body."

The note was unsigned. The lawyers were still looking t when the telephone rang. So strong is the association deas that, even as Mr. Preece tched out his hand to lift receiver, he hesitated.

"Suppose it's the police," he said. "What am I to say?"

"Why should it be the police?"

"No reason, really, I suppose. No. I'm being stupid."

Mr. Preece lifted the receiver. The girl on the switchboard said, "Oh, Mr. Preece. It's Colonel Spender for you. I'll put you through."

Mr. Preece had just sufficient presence of mind to hand his partner an extension, and both of them listened to the wheezy voice at the other end.

"Thought I'd ring you up," it said. "Just seen *The Times* myself. Thought I'd better explain, in case you jumped to the wrong conclusion. Ambrose Spender was my cousin. Distant cousin. Same names. Soon as I get out of this damned hospital I'll be round to see you. Got one or two things to discuss. Important things. Goodbye for now."

Mr. Preece looked at Sexton; and Sexton looked at Mr. Preece. There was a long silence. The younger man recovered his voice first.

"I think we'd better put this back in its envelope, don't you?" Sexton said. "After all, the instructions were that it wasn't to be opened *until* death."

"Pretend we haven't seen it?"

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"That's right."

"We can't do that."

"Why not?"

"As an Officer of the Court—" said Mr. Preece.

When he used these words, Mr. Preece, unlike many solicitors, really meant something by them. He saw himself dressed in some undefined but imposing legal uniform, defending the ancient rules and practices of the law against all attackers.

When he heard the fatal words, Sexton realized that it was no occasion for flippancy. He said, speaking slowly, "If you feel that we can't ignore this information, even though it has come into our hands in an irregular manner — for we had of course no right to open the envelope until we were *sure* that Colonel Spender was dead — then where do you visualize our duty lies?"

This was the right approach. "Irregular" and "duty" were words which Mr. Preece understood.

He said, "We shall have to consider our next move very carefully. In my submission, we have a double duty in the matter: a duty to our client not to involve him prematurely —and an equally important duty to the public not to suppress vital information about a crime. Indeed, to suppress it entirely would n us guilty of compoundin felony."

"Accessories after the fa

"Something of that sc Like most solicitors wl practices were confined conveyancing and probate, Preece really knew very l about criminal law. "And l you considered that the pc are certainly still working the case? The files on a mu are never closed. Someone mentioning, only this morn that the police had a clue. W they could even be on the p of arresting some inno person! If we produced information *after* that l pened it would certainly suspect. We might have ma factured it ourselves. The r is only typed—"

"And on a Reming standard machine," said S ton. "We've got half a doze them in the office."

"Now that you mention said Mr. Preece, "it is e possible it *was* typed in office. I recollect that w Colonel Spender came discuss his will he arrived e for his appointment and put in one of the smaller of rooms which happened to empty — the waiting room being redecorated at the ti you remember."

Sexton examined the n

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ɔre closely. "I think you're
ht," he said. "And what's
ɔre, he used a sheet of *our*
per. It's that cream-laid
arto that we had a stock of.
e girls used to complain that
was so thick they couldn't
:e proper carbon copies."
"I've been thinking," said
. Preece. "I know the
perintendent of Police at
ɔking quite well. In fact,
've played golf together more
ın once. Suppose that I give
ɑ this information, without
ealing where it comes from."
"He's certain to want to
ɔw. What will you say when
asks you?"
"It's perfectly simple. I shall
that the source of the
ɔrmation is connected with
: of my clients, and is
refore privileged."
"I see," said Sexton doubt-
y. "I hope he remembers
s a friend and not just a
iceman."
However, when Mr. Preece
sented himself at Woking
ice Station that evening, he
told that the friendly
-playing Superintendent was
leave, and would be absent
a fortnight. This was
:oncerting. He hardly felt
t he could withhold vital
ɔrmation that long. He
nd himself talking to a much
ɪnger and less friendly
ɔector. As soon as Mr. Preece mentioned the name of Theresa Slaney, the Inspector said, "I think, sir, you had better wait for a few minutes. The case was handled by Central. It won't take long to get hold of Superintendent Marker. I happen to know that he's over at Weybridge."

It took forty minutes to bring Superintendent Marker to the station and by that time Mr. Preece, who had already completed a full day's work, was both hungry and tired.

The Superintendent was a huge man with a red face, who looked as if he had been poured into his enormous blue suit and left to set. He had also missed his dinner and this may have made him even brusquer than usual. He said, "I understand you've something to tell us about the Knaphill case. I was in charge of that case—in fact, I still am, so you can tell me about it." As he said this he signaled to a uniformed sergeant who had come in behind and was now seated unobtrusively in the corner with notebook open and pencil poised.

This was so different from the friendly chat which Mr. Preece had anticipated that he hardly knew how to begin. It occurred to him that he ought to establish his own *bona fides* first. He said, "My name is

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Malcolm Preece. I work—"

"That's all right," said Superintendent Marker. "I've looked you up in the Law List. And got your local particulars from the sergeant here. It's just the information I want."

"It has come to my knowledge," said Mr. Preece, picking his words carefully, "that a document exists in which a local resident confesses that he was responsible for the Slaney murder."

"Let's see it."

"I'm afraid I'm not allowed to let you have it."

"Who wrote it?"

"I can't tell you that."

"How did you get it?"

"That is also confidential."

"You'll have to tell someone sometime. Why not tell me now?"

"There will be no compulsion on me, at any time, to reveal the source of my information," said Mr. Preece with all the dignity he could muster. "It is privileged, as between solicitor and client."

The Superintendent made a noise deep down in his throat. It sounded like the noise of a hungry lion. He said, "This isn't a matter of who-owes-who-tuppence-halfpenny. This is a case of murder. If you've really got any information, cough it up quick. If you haven't, let's all go home."

"As to whether this inform tion is privileged, I'd be hap to refer the matter to the L Society. And may I add tha don't care for your manner."

"I don't give a brass monk if you like my manner or no said the Superintendent, getti up. "You've dragged me c when I was just sitting down my first hot meal in two da If you nuts are going to co along with phony confessio you might at least have t kindness to do it in offi hours."

He signaled to the sergea who was grinning broad "Come on, son," he said, "le get home."

Mr. Preece was very ang too. But it occurred to him t he had not fully delivered t message he intended. He sa "Before you go, I might a add that I wonder if you e found the glove?"

There was a moment of to stillness. Then, without seemi to have moved, Superintende Marker was back at the tab staring at Mr. Preece, and t sergeant was sitting down ag in the corner, notebook op and pencil poised.

It was as though a fi director had said, "Cut. W take that scene again." O this time it wasn't the sa scene. The Superintendent h lost all trace of fatigue a

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edom. He had settled his sive form into his chair, n the air of one who was pared to stay in it all night. "Well, Mr. Preece," he said, *iat* was that about a glove?"

The next two hours were ly the most unpleasant that Preece ever spent. He had er imagined that the same stion could be asked so ny times and in so many erent ways. At the end of it was quite surprised to find it was only nine o'clock. would not have been greatly prised if it had been night. His housekeeper, Mrs. llecomb, was waiting for , looking worried.

I couldn't imagine what happened to you," she said. rang the stationmaster. He your train was on time, and seen you on it. I put your ier in the oven, but it'll be ried up."

I'm sorry," said Mr. Preece. ve it up in five minutes." n he pushed past the nished Mrs. Biddlecomb, t into the library, and ted himself out a large key. It was the first time he had ever drunk spirits re dinner.

It's quite clear," said on, "that you can't stop . You've got to let them the whole story."

"That's quite impossible," said Mr. Preece. He had not slept well, but the coming of morning had restored some of his self-possession, and the familiar surroundings of his office had gone a long way to complete the cure.

"Why is it impossible?"

"Because they'll go straight down to the hospital and start questioning Colonel Spender. He's a sick man. If that Superintendent starts on *him*, it'll probably kill him."

"It's his own fault. He's brought the whole thing on himself by writing that damn silly note."

"And how are we going to explain to the Colonel about opening it?"

Sexton said, with a touch of impatience, "Tell him the truth. It was a mistake. And a perfectly natural one—"

"I know—but—"

"Have you considered what may happen if you don't come clean?"

"What do you mean? What could happen? They can pester me with a lot of silly questions, but they can't arrest me."

"Can't they?"

"What for?"

"For the murder of Theresa Slaney."

Mr. Preece stared at him as though his partner had gone mad.

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Sexton said, "Do you know what you were doing on the evening of March 25th, two years ago?"

"Of course I don't. But I can soon find out."

Mr. Preece was a methodical man. His working diaries for the last six years were stacked in a shelf behind his desk. "March 25th? That was a Friday. I'm usually at home on a Friday. On Thursday I see I went to the local Law Society dinner. And on Saturday I played bridge. I assume that on Friday I was at home."

"Alone?"

"Naturally. As soon as Mrs. Biddlecomb has cleared and washed the dinner things and laid my breakfast, she goes home."

"Which would be about what time?"

"She's usually away by nine. Why?"

"I've been reading up the case. The medical evidence was that Mrs. Slaney died shortly before or shortly after midnight. Her house is about fifteen minutes' walk from yours, through Knaphill Woods."

"But—you're joking, aren't you? This is a piece of your nonsense, David. What possible motive could I have for killing the woman? I knew her by sight, it's true, but I don't think I'd ever spoken to her."

"It was strongly hinted the inquest that Mrs. Sla was a high-class prostitu Appointments by telephone was also hinted that a lot of customers were respecta citizens in the neighborho and that she was making qui bit of money on the side gentle blackmail. The po were pretty certain that she killed by one of the custon she'd squeezed too hard, or often."

"But good heavens, you not suggesting—"

"*I'm* not suggesting a thing. But the police do know you as well as I do."

"But," said Mr. Pree "even if—I mean—even if th was the slightest simulacrum truth in this fantastic s gestion, why should I have g out of my way to call attention of the police myself?"

"Their minds work in peculiar way," said Sext "I'm afraid that the sequence ideas which may occur to th is this: you read in *The Ti* of the death of your neigh and client, Colonel Spender. was an obvious candidate Mrs. Slaney's favors. He wa great womanizer and he lived the neighborhood, alone si his wife died. He probably no alibi for the night

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question. So you—the real murderer—decide to foist it on to him and close the case forever.

"You arrive ahead of me at the office—which you did, incidentally—type out this confession on office paper with an office machine—they'll be able to prove all that easily enough—then go down to the strongroom and put the 'confession' with the will. Knowing, of course, that we'll have it up at once since you're the executor of the Colonel's estate. I mean—it's plausible."

Mr. Preece, whose face had been growing redder and redder, said in a stifled voice, "I think you're right. I'll go round this evening."

"I see," said Superintendent Marker. He said it in a voice so neutral that the words were devoid of meaning. "Was it you or your partner who opened this—what did you call it—deed wallet?"

"I think I opened it myself."

"Could you describe it?"

"It's a stout manila folder." Mr. Preece demonstrated the size with his hands. "We have one for each client. It would have deeds and documents in it. And any will or codicil. Important documents which we keep under lock and key."

"And when do you suppose this—this other envelope—was put in it?"

"The will was dated almost exactly a year ago. I assume the envelope was put away with it. Clients often put a letter of wishes with their will."

"You assume? You don't remember?"

"I can't say that I definitely remember it. I put documents away every day. The person who certainly *will* remember it is Colonel Spender."

"Yes," said the Superintendent. "I expect he might have. You see, he died this morning."

While Mr. Preece was still gaping at him, the Superintendent added, "I'll have to take instructions on this. I'd like to ask you not to go away in the meantime."

"What do you mean, go away?"

"Go abroad."

"I've no intention of going abroad," said Mr. Preece, with dignity. "I shall be going to my office at precisely the usual hour tomorrow."

"That'll be very convenient, sir. For I shall probably be calling on you."

The Superintendent was as good as his word. He called the next morning at ten o'clock, bringing the sergeant with him. They faced Mr. Preece and Mr.

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Sexton across the table on which lay the Spender deed wallet.

"So this is the one, is it. Name on the outside. I see. And a number. You keep things in good order in your office, Mr. Preece."

"We have a considerable number of papers to look after."

"But it's only the important ones, like this, that you keep locked up?"

"That is so."

"Where do you keep them?"

"In the strongroom, in the basement."

"And who has the keys?"

"My partner, Mr. Sexton, and myself."

"I see," said the Superintendent. He had been fiddling with the string, and now the wallet fell open; the will in its long legal envelope and the smaller white envelope both slid out onto the table. The Superintendent, who was holding the wallet, gave it a shake. "There's more inside," he said. "What would they be?"

"The deeds of his house at Woking, I imagine," said Sexton. "And there are a couple of deeds of covenant in favor of the local hospital, I fancy. Why don't we have a look?"

The Superintendent gave the wallet a shake. The first thing which came out, with some difficulty, was a packet deeds. Then came two separa deeds. Finally, three whi envelopes.

"Hullo," said Mr. Preec "What are those?"

Each one had, typed on the words: *To be placed wi my will and opened only at m death.*

"Good heavens!" said M Preece. "What on earth—"

"They must have got stuc behind the deeds," said Sexto "Shall I—?"

He looked at Mr. Preec who looked at the Superi tendent, who was watchir impassively.

"We might as well," he sai "Maybe they say he changed h mind and *didn't* do it, aft all."

The first note was short. said: "I should like m Executors to inform the Amer can Ambassador that I sh President Kennedy."

The second was shorter stil It said: "I am Jack the Ripper.

"Well," said the Superi tendent. "That's two mor mysteries solved, isn't it?" Th atmosphere seemed suddenly t have got lighter. "I've bee making a few inquiries abou Colonel Spender. I understan he was a rare old leg-puller. As matter of fact, we shouldn have taken a lot of notice of th first note if it hadn't been fo

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; mentioning the glove. That
ıs odd. Because we did find a
›ve, a single one, under the
dy. We kept it up our sleeves,
you might say."

"But," said Mr. Sexton, "if
u didn't tell anyone, how did
›lonel Spender find out?"

"We had to institute a lot of
quiries. It was a foreign
›ve—artificial pigskin, made in
lgium. What happened, I've
› doubt, was that someone
ld someone else—in con-
lence, of course—and they
ssed it on. These things get
out. You know how it is."

Mr. Preece nodded.

"I'm sorry it's all come to
›thing," said the Superin-
ıdent. "But that's the way
th these inquiries. We have to
llow up each line until it runs
t. Come on, son."

"I'll show you out," said Sexton.

When they had gone, Mr. Preece sat staring at the little pile of documents on the table in front of him, a frown on his face. He wasn't thinking about the glove. As the Superintendent said, these things got out. Women in railway carriages who had aunts who had cooks who were walking out with policemen—that sort of thing. What was bothering him were the other envelopes. He himself had emptied the deed wallet, and was certain there had been nothing else in it.

However, as he had sometimes remarked to his clients, "If there's a theoretical solution, I can usually work it out. If I'm stuck, David Sexton can often find a practical answer."

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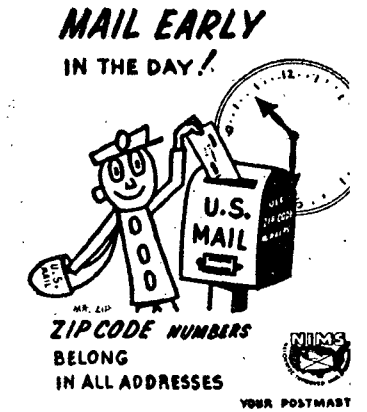

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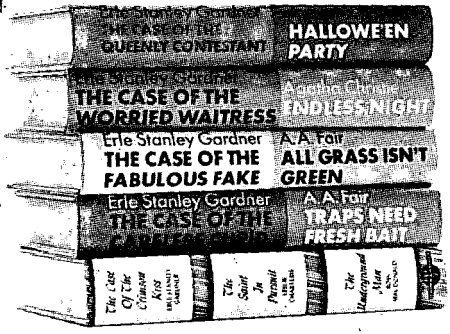

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